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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAR. 1979
VOL. 43, NO. 3

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MURDER GO ROUND

VOELKER:

**We have your daughter
and son-in-law.**

Will be in touch.

**Call police, we feed them
to the sharks.**

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

Both the Police and the F.B.I. Were Baffled by the Cassie Goodman Kidnapping. Was It a Fake—or Was It for Real?
It Took Mike Shayne to Find out, the Hard Way!

IT WAS SUNDAY night and Mike Shayne had just driven from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to Miami Beach with the seven-year-old Chichester girl, Sandra—after persuading the father who'd stolen her that his daughter would be better off with her mother, unless and until the proper court decided otherwise. Mrs. Annabel Chichester was a school friend of Lucy Hamilton, Mike's long-time secretary-companion, and it had been what Lucy called one of their Compassion Cases. Translated, that meant bare expenses, nothing more.

The big detective had felt like a heel, talking the young father out of his daughter, and had moped about it throughout the non-stop drive from Lancaster with the curly-headed

gamine asleep most of the time on the back seat of his supercharged Buick. But Sandra's tearful reunion with her mother had been some reward.

Mike had called Lucy when he arrived. "Do me a favor, girl?" he asked.

"Anything for you, Uncle Mike," Lucy said in her sweetest voice, "although I'm a little jealous right now. You've never bought me a doll. I've just talked with Annabel and Sandra."

Mike sighed aloud.

"This favor?" Lucy asked.

"No more school-chum clients, okay?" Mike said. "I had to convince a state cop in George that I wasn't a perverted kidnapper, and I don't know how many women I had to con into

taking Sandra to the bathroom. Is that all little girls do?"

Lucy laughed. "You shouldn't have indulged her fancy for cherry cokes so often."

"That little vixen," Mike admitted, "could charm buzzards out of a tall tree."

"Michael, thank you." Lucy's voice had gone husky. "No more school chums, and that's a solemn promise. By the way, a Bennett Voelker has been most anxious to get in touch with you. He's been ringing the office phone off the hook." Lucy was her normal, unsentimental self now. "Do you know Bennett Voelker?"

Mike culled his tired mind. "I don't think so, but I believe I should. Voelker rings some sort of a bell."

"Voelker Enterprises," Lucy said. "That's just the holding company. Voelker Car Rentals—*Others try harder, we do better*—Voelker Cement Company, Van Lines—*You can trust us*—just to name a few of the companies Bennett Voelker owns. Is the bell ringing, Michael?"

"Got it," Mike said. "Home in Palm Beach, but lives on his luxury yacht. Two daughters, twins, and separated from his wife, Diane. Why does he need a private cop?"

"It's not for my shell-pink ear," Lucy said. "But he burned both ears trying to get your unlisted number there at the apartment. Ma Belle wouldn't give it

out, no matter how much Bennett Voelker is worth. By the way, that's about twenty-five million, according to Tim Rourke. You owe Tim a drink."

"I always do," Mike said. "Tim has two hollow legs. Did Voelker leave a number?"

"No, curiously enough," Lucy said. "I told him you'd probably be in the office tomorrow morning. Michael, you sound a little beat. Why don't you have a nightcap and go to bed?"

"I thought you'd never ask," Mike said. "Good night, sweetheart."

There was something tucked away in the corner of Mike's memory about one of the Voelker twins, but tomorrow would be time enough to worry it from its hiding place. He stripped, showered and poured himself a stiff Martell brandy.

It was midnight, and Mike thought he'd be ready to tumble into bed when he finished the nightcap, but the long drive and the sweet but demanding little girl had him keyed up. So he settled down before the television after pouring himself a second drink.

The late show happened to be *The Maltese Falcon*, with Humphrey Bogart and Sidney Greenstreet. Mike watched it with a jaundiced eye. He admired the late actor and knew Dashiell Hammet had once been a private investigator in San Francisco,

but Hollywood screen writers and producers, Mike decided, knew enough about private detectives to fill a thimble.

Still, watching the tube, sipping a second nightcap, Mike began to uncoil.

Uncle Mike. The big detective smiled. Before car-motion lulled Sandra to sleep, she had pestered him with questions. "Do you know what little girls are, Uncle Mike?" had been one.

"Sugar, spice and everything nice?"

"No!" the little girl had giggled. "They're just soft boys."

Mike hoped he had done the right thing taking Sandra from her father. In pajama pants, with feet cocked up on a hassock, the redhead finished his second nightcap, then locked hands behind his neck to watch the final confrontation between Sam Spade and the Fat Man.

The buzzer in the apartment foyer sounded once, tentatively, then raucously, as if someone with a heavy thumb were leaning on it outside the street door.

"Damn!" Mike climbed to his feet and padded into the bedroom to take his Colt .45 off the nighttable.

This elementary precaution taken, he glanced at his watch, to discover it was quarter to two. It occurred to him that bachelor Tim Rourke might be out on Miami Beach, even if it was Monday morning. He punched

the button that released the front door lock and waited.

When he heard the private elevator door slide open at the end of the hall, he eased the apartment door open an inch, and put his shoulders against the opposite wall to face it. The Colt in his right hand reassured him. Mike had never been paranoic, or the nervous type, but had long ago learned that in his line of work it didn't pay to take chances with early-morning surprise visitors.

He heard the click of heels in the hall, then a timid knock on his door. Mike waited. The door was slowly pushed open. "Mister Shayne?"

II

THE HALL LIGHT spilling through the open doorway was behind her, so her face was in deep shadow. All Mike could be sure about was that this was a young woman. Forgetting for a moment his lack of clothes, Mike snapped on the foyer light. The woman's shocked gasp reminded Mike he wasn't dressed for company, especially the female variety.

"My God, I'm sorry," he said. "Come on in and be comfortable until I slip into something warmer."

The detective fled for the bedroom and his terrycloth robe with the ragged cuffs. When

he rejoined his visitor, she had taken his chair in front of the television, her light trench coat folded over the arm, and was placidly buffing her nails.

Shayne snapped off the set. He had put his Colt back on the night-table. He settled on the sofa, hands clasped between his knees, and studied his visitor. Her mousy brown hair was done in a knot at the base of her neck. The grey traveling suit she wore was, Mike realized, very expensive, but it looked shabby and ill-fitting. Her oxfords were the sensible kind.

High cheekbones, widely-spaced grey-blue eyes, a stubborn chin and mouth, no make-up and a nose pert enough, which could use a dust of powder, completed Mike's inventory-taking.

She was patient. Intent on her nails, she had not in any way indicated that she was aware of his inspection. But when Shayne cleared his throat, she said, "Satisfied, Mr. Shayne?"

She slipped the nail buffer into the shoulder bag she had laid on top of the trenchcoat. "I'm Catherine Voelker," she said, "and my father is frantic to get in touch with you about my sister, Cassandra—Cassie, we call her.

"She and her baseball jock are supposed to be on their honeymoon. There is a remote possibility they might have been kidnapped and are being held for

ransom. Father and mother are very upset."

"What about you?" the red-head asked. "Cassie is your twin, I understand."

"We were born a few minutes apart," Catherine said, "but we're not identical, and I'd like to repeat that. We're siblings, not identical twins. Is that clear?"

"I think so," Shayne said, bemused. "You haven't answered my question, though. Are you upset?"

Catherine frowned, as if she had to think before replying. "It depends," she said. "I'm inclined to believe she and Gussie Goodman are trying to extort money from Daddy.

"You see, Daddy flatly refused to increase her monthly allowance from a thousand dollars when she married the Goodman creep. On the other hand, Cassie and her husband may have fallen into the wrong hands. That's what Daddy expects you to find out."

Shayne tugged at an earlobe. "Where is Daddy?" he asked.

"Aboard his yacht up in Fort Lauderdale in the Bahia Mar Marina. Mother is at our Palm Beach home. I live with her and visit Daddy when he isn't entertaining a new girlfriend. Why do older men like you and daddy prefer girls to women, Mr. Shayne?"

He sighed. "Catherine, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a psychologist, Mr. Shayne, with a Ph.D from Tulane University in New Orleans. I practice in Fort Lauderdale. I am self-supporting. I attended Tulane on a scholarship and did my graduate work on a fellowship."

"Very commendable," Shayne said. "Why are you here in the early morning hours? Daddy could have reached me at the office tomorrow morning."

"Both he and mother are frantic, Mr. Shayne. It's been two days since the last note and phone call, so I had to do something for their sake. Have I answered your question?"

"No. You wanted to see me before I contact either of them, right?"

Catherine Voelker managed a wispy smile. "You are very penetrating. I know my sister very much better than either of them do. I also wanted to size you up. There are some sleazy characters in your line of work. Mother and Father are quite vulnerable right now."

"Have you sized me up?" Shayne asked.

"Yes."

"And what's your opinion, doctor?"

"Your size is impressive. Small men often suffer from inferiority, and hence are somewhat psychotic and inclined to be belligerent. You are a cautious man to answer the door with a weapon in your

hand. You couldn't very well conceal it from me, could you?"

The detective shrugged. "No pockets in pajama pants."

"I think I can trust you with my parents," Catherine told him. "Of course, I've made inquiries before this nocturnal visit. One does, you know, if one is a woman. The fear of attack and rape..."

Shayne raised a hand. "All right, doctor. Let me off the couch."

Catherine eyed his empty glass. "Might I have a drink?" she asked.

"Certainly. Is brandy all right?"

Catherine nodded.

The redhead rummaged in the kitchenette until he found a snifter Lucy had once given him, during the stage in their relationship when she was trying to wean him from drinking Martells over ice. After washing and polishing it with a dish towel, he poured three fingers into it.

Catherine sniffed the brandy with appreciation. Mike watched her carefully sip at it, and the slight trembling of her hands didn't go unnoticed. He admired the iron will she used to control her nerves.

"More?" he asked when she had finished.

Catherine shook her head. "No thanks."

"How old are you?" he asked.

"You shouldn't ask a woman's

age," Catherine replied, "but I'm twenty-five."

"I seem to remember your sister made the local papers frequently a year or two ago, Catherine. Gossip columns mainly. What did they call her?"

Catherine made a wry face. "The 'Madcap Voelker Heiress,' I believe. Cassie really worked hard at it for a while, mainly to spite me, I suspect."

"You're the psychologist," he said. "Gussie Goodman, now, didn't he used to play first base for the Giants?"

"The Braves," Catherine corrected, "and he was a pitcher. He won twenty games his last season, and lost only nine. Then Gussie broke his arm in an accident. It finished him in the majors."

Baseball was only a passing interest with Mike Shayne; college and pro football were his sports preferences. In the morning, Tim Rourke of the *Miami Daily News* would oblige him with the complete backfile on the Braves' pitcher, so he dropped that line of questioning.

"You mentioned a note," he reminded Catherine. "Do you have it?"

"Yes." She dug into her shoulder bag. "Here it is."

Shayne took the single piece of paper from her gingerly, but then realized any latent prints on it were probably

smeared by this time.

VOELKER: WE HAVE YOU
DADGHTER AND SON-IN-
LAW. WILL BE IN TO CH.
CALL POLICE, WE FEED
THEM TO THE SHARKS.

"Sweet and to the point," he commented, fingering the thick paper. The note had been typed on half of an 8½ x 11 sheet, so there was no watermark, but it was a good rag stock. The sort, Mike thought, investment specialists and bankers might use for a letterhead.

"Tell me about the phone call," he said.

"Daddy took it. That was two days ago. They want a million for the two of them."

"How delivered?"

"They said they would call back about that, but they haven't. Mother is a wreck, and Daddy isn't much better off. Sweet Cassie was always his favorite."

"They?" He questioned.

"What? Oh, just a figure of speech. It was a disguised voice, and Daddy said it could be a man or a woman."

"They," the redhead mused. "Could we call that a Freudian slip, Doctor?"

"All right. I think it's Cassie and Gussie, as I've said, but if it isn't . . ." Catherine shivered. "They've threatened to send her fingers in the mail, one by one, if the ransom isn't paid."

"How" did you know where I live?" he asked. "My office on East Flagler Street is listed, but this apartment isn't."

"I'm moderately clever," Catherine said. "I remembered an article about you recently by Tim Rourke, so I called him with a touching story."

Shayne laughed. "So much for privacy. Have you a place to stay here in Miami Beach?"

"No. I drove down from Lauderdale today, and have been trying the buzzer downstairs since early afternoon. Then I saw the Buick that might belong to you and tried one more time."

"Okay. Now here's what we're going to do. We can't have Cassie's sister running around unescorted until we find out what's really coming down, so I'm stashing you with a good friend until tomorrow morning. Then we'll have breakfast and drive up the coast to Lauderdale. I'll be dressed in a minute."

He moved toward the bedroom, already unbelted his terrycloth robe.

"Mr. Shayne?"

He stopped, but didn't look back at Catherine.

"Do we have to bother your friend?" Catherine asked. "We're two adults. I can sleep here on the couch."

The timbre of Catherine's voice told him more than her words what she really had in mind.

He smiled back at her over his shoulder. "If you weren't quite so attractive," he lied, "that sort of arrangement might be satisfactory."

He continued on into the bedroom to step into slacks, pull on the cashmere sweater Lucy had given him for his last birthday and step into loafers. He tucked the Colt .45 under his belt, covered by the sweater, and rejoined Catherine. She was already in her trenchcoat.

"Where's your car?" he asked Catherine.

"Parked on the street right behind yours."

"We'll take mine and then pick yours up in the morning on our way to Lauderdale," he said.

"Ah, the masterful male in full stride," Catherine muttered under her breath.

Mike Shayne grinned. "Very small girls call me Uncle Mike," he told Catherine Voelker, "but you can shorten that to just Mike."

"May I ask the sex of this friend who shelters females you find in distress?" Catherine said.

"Her name is Lucy."

"Your mistress by any chance?" Catherine asked.

"That," Mike told her, "is none of your damned business."

III.

MIKE SHAYNE was in crying

need of sleep once he awakened Lucy Hamilton from a sound sleep and introduced her to Catherine. But he needed to know as much as possible about Cassandra Voelker, now Mrs. Gus Goodman, before he interviewed her mother and father. He parked in the Miami *Daily News* parking lot and found the night side editor, Baxter Freund.

Freund was a bald little man with eyes disillusioned from watching the parade of human misery that crossed his desk. Instead of the traditional green eyeshade, Baxter always wore a battered straw hat. He carried to work each night a fresh bottle of some white medicine to ease his ulcer. The redhead found him devouring a bowl of milk and crackers.

"Got insomnia, Shayne, or something on your mind?" Freund asked when Mike perched on the corner of his desk.

Shayne patted a yawn. "Sleep I can use," he admitted, "but I need information about a Cassandra Voelker. Can you help me out?"

Freund peered up at him from under the brim of the hat. He was noted in newspaper circles for his encyclopedic memory. He closed his eyes as if reading a tape spewing from his memory bank.

"The Madcap Heiress, most recently married to Gussie Goodman, the former ballplayer, now

partner with a certain Harold Faulkner in the Goodman Fruit Juice Company that rumor says will soon go into receivership.

"First marriage, at sixteen, to a polo player, Rex Harris. He was twenty-seven. Daddy Voelker got it nixed. Next married to some Italian fellow. Lasted a month. Rumor has it that Daddy bought him off." Freund opened his eyes. "So what's news with Cassie these days?"

"Your paper will be the first to know when I find out," Shayne assured him. "Thanks."

"Any time." Freund picked up his spoon and dipped into the milk and crackers again. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "There's a cot in Tim Rourke's office now. Why don't you borrow it for your hefty frame? You look beat, Shayne."

"Thanks." The detective nodded. "I think I will for a couple of hours."

Before he dozed, Shayne considered the distinct possibility that Cassie and her husband were trying to extort money from Bennett Voelker, what with Goodman's financial trouble and his wife considering a thousand dollars each month a niggardly sum. The solution to Voelker's problem would be to find the pair. The redhead decided that should not be too hard. They were amateurs at the disappearing game.

He thought his eyes had been closed only for a moment when

someone moved his shoes off the blanket. He snapped awake, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, to find gangling Tim Rourke standing over him. Morning light was streaming into the office.

"That's my security blanket," the reporter complained. "You might have taken off your shoes, Irish oaf."

"And a good morning to you, Tim," Shayne smiled. "You should have taken off that suit last night before you went to bed."

Tim looked down and brushed at the wrinkles in his grey flannel suit. "I must have forgotten," he said. "I was in a hurry when I went to bed."

"On the other hand," Mike told his friend, "if you ever came to work in a pressed suit, nobody on the day side of the newspaper would recognize you."

There was purpose in Mike Shayne's borrowing of Tim's office cot. Rourke was an ardent baseball fan.

"I guess not," Tim admitted. "Do you have a news beat for me? Payday is the day after tomorrow, and I could use a bonus. My bar bill at The Beef House is overdue."

"What ruined Gussie Goodman's baseball career?" Shayne asked.

"A broken arm."

"How did he break it?" Mike asked.

Tim rubbed his nose with a

forefinger. "Falling in his shower at home was the official version. Rumor says some bad boys broke it for him."

"Gussie is a born gambler. The Braves let him go pretty much on that account. He could have pitched relief, I hear, when his arm healed."

"What's coming down, Mike? Gussie just married one of the Voelker girls. Did you know that?"

Mike nodded. "Cassandra Voelker, also known as Cassie. Off the record for now, Tim, rumor has it that Cassie and her most recent husband are trying to shake her old man down for a million with a kidnapping hoax."

Tim Rourke's eyes lit up. "Now *that's* what I call a real news beat." His face clouded. "When can I get the who, what, why, where and when?"

"Just as soon as I do," the detective told the reporter. "Meanwhile, I need a favor."

"*That* figures," Tim said. "Is this story going to cost me an arm and a leg?"

"Just a bit of shoe leather, Tim. I want to know how many markers Gussie Goodman has outstanding, and who has them. Lean on your tattle tales and spread a few bucks around if you have to."

"No sweat," Tim said. "I suppose you need the info yesterday, though."

"This afternoon will do," Mike

Shayne told him. "I'll call from Lauderdale."

In the parking lot for employees of the *Miami Daily News* Mike checked the Buick's hood for any stray fingerprints. When he found none, he wiped dust from the lightly oiled surface of the hood. Before Mike got behind the wheel, he removed the match folder from the driver's seat that was in the same position he had left it last night. More than one attempt to blow him away in his Buick made this pre-driving check a matter of habit.

When he drove to Lucy Hamilton's apartment building it was ten minutes to eight. Lucy answered his special knock dressed for work.

"Good morning, Michael." She brushed a kiss on his lips, then his cheek. "Just in time to join Catherine and me for breakfast."

Catherine, drinking her second cup of coffee in the breakfast nook of Lucy's apartment, gave him a warm good-morning smile. "Did you get any sleep last night, Mike?"

Catherine Voelker was warmer this morning and most of her professional reserve was gone, so the redhead realized Lucy had done her usual confidence-building job with this client.

"I caught a few winks," he said and turned to Lucy. "Damned if I know how you do it on such short notice."

There was a thick breakfast steak ready for him, with a cheese omelet, and hot buttered rolls.

"Magic," Lucy said. "Eat hearty. Catherine says you may have a busy day ahead."

Lucy's breakfast was grapefruit and a hard roll. Catherine was eating scrambled eggs and thin strips of bacon, with a cup of tea instead of coffee. She also had a serving of dry toast.

"Mike, there's a picnic and outing next week for the Miami Crippled Childrens' Society. They want to take the children this time to the Monkey Jungle. I said you'd probably go," Lucy told him while they were eating.

"It's Saturday a week. The MCCS is Mike's favorite charity," she explained to Catherine. "The kids love him."

Shayne demurred. "I go along on these things when I can to keep my wits sharp," he explained to the psychologist. "You can bluff adults but never kids—especially these crippled ones."

"You will go then?" Lucy asked.

He nodded. "You and I. You can take the girls to the bathroom."

"It's a date," Lucy said; "Now I've got to run. Cranky boss," she explained to Catherine. "He wants his office opened on the dot."

"She's quite a secretary," Catherine said when Lucy Hamilton was gone. "Why don't you marry her? Or are you two of

the liberated generation."

Shayne smiled. "It's my job to ask the questions, Catherine." He pushed away his empty plate. "How did your sister meet Gussie Goodman?"

"I don't see why that should concern you," the psychologist parried. "Your job is to find out if this is a kidnapping or just a cruel hoax."

Shayne, instead of replying, waited for Catherine to tell him what he wanted to know.

"What I mean is, Mike, there's no reason" She stopped. "Oh, all right. I introduced them." She shrugged. "You would have found out, anyway. Mother blames *me* for the marriage."

"Is she right?" he asked.

"No! Gussie—Mr. Goodman came to me as a patient a year ago. Cassie blew into my office while we were having a therapy session. She took it from there."

The detective thoughtfully drummed the breakfast table with his fingers. "Why did Goodman come to you?"

Catherine blushed, and there was a stubborn set to her jaw. "That I cannot tell you, Mike. What transpires between a patient and me is held in the strictest confidence, as you should very well understand. I believe the ethics are the same in your chosen profession."

"With some exceptions," he said. "It's open season if I

find a client indulging in criminal activity. Some of my colleagues aren't so fussy."

Catherine was silent, but her expression told him she was trying to make up her mind about something.

"I deal with many dangerous people," he went on. "For that reason I want all the background knowledge I can get once I'm on a case. But as yet I haven't been retained by your father, have I?"

"You will be," Catherine promised.

"Nearly a year in therapy for Goodman would seem to indicate he's a very disturbed man."

"No longer," Catherine said. "I'm quite competent in *my* chosen field."

"I'll bet you *are*," he said. "Well, let's be on our way. Time is wasting."

IV

A FEW MILES up the highway toward Fort Lauderdale, he pulled into a service station, and handed the attendant his credit card: "Fill her up, and check the oil and air," he said.

Catherine's Chevrolet had followed him into the station, but not to the pumps.

"Phone call," he explained to her on his way to the booth.

Shayne dialed his East Flagler Street office and Lucy answered

on the first ring. "Mike Shayne Agency."

"Me, Angel," he said. "You alone?"

"No."

Mike gave her the number of the public phone, and hung up.

Catherine was coming back from the rest rooms. "Did you make your call?" she asked.

"Not yet," the redhead said. He was keeping the booth door open with his shoulder. "My party was busy."

The phone rang.

"Excuse me?" He stepped into the booth and closed the door. "Lucy?" he asked.

"Who else?" She sounded relaxed. "A wife was here wanting surveillance on her wayward husband. I explained our policy about divorce work and got rid of her. Nothing important in the mail this morning."

"That isn't why I called," the detective said.

Lucy laughed. "I know. You want my feminine opinion of your fair companion this morning. I can put it in just two words. Be careful."

"Do you want to expand that a little?"

"No," Lucy said. "Anything else?"

"Yes," Shayne told her. "You talk too much."

Lucy laughed again. "I'm having one of my mysterious moods this morning. Seriously, Michael, the good doctor is very deep,

so don't get drowned in the feminine charm that she's disguising. Okay?"

"Got it," he said, and hung up.

It had long ago become habit with Lucy and Shayne not to mention any names over the phone, and to exchange information in such a way that anyone tapping into their phone conversations would be more confused than enlightened. At regular periods he hired a trusted employee of National Electronic Security Company to check the office and their home phones for bugs.

By referring to Catherine Voelker as "very deep" Lucy had told him she suspected the woman had come to him before her father could get in touch for motives as yet undisclosed. Reference to disguised feminine charm told him Lucy knew, again for motives as yet unknown, that Catherine was deliberately making herself unattractive.

Mike Shayne's original conclusions about Dr. Catherine Voelker had just been confirmed by Lucy. Lucy's ability to read character, insofar as other women were concerned, he accepted as better than his own.

Catherine took over the lead as they neared Fort Lauderdale. The detective had the opportunity to study her driving. She was careful and precise, but handled her Chevrolet skillfully. She led him directly to the dock where Bennett Voelker lived aboard his

luxury yacht, *Cassiecat*.

"It used to be the *Diane* before he and mother went their separate ways," Catherine told him. "Daddy is sometimes a sentimental idiot." She added, "Cat is his nickname for me, in case the name confuses you."

Catherine gave him the Palm Beach address of her mother before she drove away from the dock. "Come see us when you've finished with Daddy," she invited.

Bennett Voelker was a fit man in his early fifties with a pugnacious jaw and pencil-line moustache across his upper lip. His hair was fashionably long, but carefully trimmed, and he wore a yachting cap with salt-corroded braid. The armed crewman at the head of the gangplank contacted Voelker by intercom and the millionaire came on deck to greet Mike personally with a strong handshake.

"How did you get here so soon?" he asked with a glance at his digital watch. "I was only in touch with your secretary half an hour ago. She said you'd be here soon, but *this* soon is ridiculous."

"Magic carpet," the redhead said. Lucy had seen fit to keep the fact that he was with Catherine quiet, so Mike instinctively followed her lead.

"I'll have to buy me one of those."

Voelker led Shayne below the decks to the cabin that was his

office, and as soon as they were behind closed doors Voelker dropped his guard.

"Shayne, I'm ready to blow my mind," he said. "My daughter Cassie and her husband, Gus Goodman, are supposed to be on their honeymoon. Now I've been informed by a note and telephone call that they are being held for a million dollars ransom."

"The note has somehow disappeared but it says something about feeding them to the sharks unless I pay up, or if I call in the FBI or police. Now here's my problem. This whole thing, I'm ashamed to admit, may be a hoax. I don't put it beyond Cassie or that fortune hunter she married."

"No word about how to pay yet?" the detective asked.

"Not yet," Voelker told him. "What's your fee for shaking this thing down? I'll pay any reasonable price, and more for you to be my go-between if you prove it's a real kidnapping. I have enough enemies to make that plausible."

"Ten percent if it's a hoax. Mike Shayne said. "If it's for real, a thousand up front and a second grand once Cassie and her husband are out of hock."

"My God, man!" Voelker exploded. "If it's a hoax to defraud me, you're talking about a hundred thousand!"

Shayne nodded. "To save a million you can easily afford

that much."

Voelker stared at him, a pulse beating in his forehead. "You believe it's a hoax, don't you?"

"It could be."

Voelker's eyes narrowed. "I'm trying to figure how you could be in this with Cassie and Gus Goodman," he admitted.

The redhead got up to leave.

"Not so fast," Voelker said. "I agree to your terms."

As if on cue, the phone on Voelker's desk rang. Mike could hear the buzz of a hysterical voice on the other end of the line, and saw the knuckles of Voelker's hand holding the phone going white. Color drained from his face under the tan and he looked ten years older.

With a shaking hand, after the hysterical voice stopped, and Voelker said tersely, "I'll be there," he dropped the phone on its cradle.

"The so-called kidnappers?" Shayne asked.

"No." Voelker shook his head as if to clear it. "My ex-wife. They've just dumped Gussie Goodman out on her front lawn, dead as a mackerel, with a note pinned to his chest. Cassie is next if I don't pay up within twenty four hours."

"So here we go on the bargain rate," the detective said.

ious Voelker Palm Beach home the front lawn swarmed with police, and two FBI agents in conservative suits and ties were questioning a distraught Mrs. Voelker and a haggard Catherine. The agents introduced themselves as William Rubin and Ted Florsheim. They moved with Mike into the front hall while Voelker tried to console his wife and daughter.

"Mr. Shayne; you know our policy in cases like this one," Agent Rubin said. He was the senior of the two. "Hands off until the girl is safe."

Shayne nodded. He had never met either of these agents, but they evidently knew him. "Voelker has hired me to deliver the money."

Rubin nodded. "Make sure you're not buying a dead girl. People who would do to Goodman what they did are animals."

The body on the front lawn had been covered when Bennett Voelker and the redhead walked past it to reach the house.

"How was Goodman killed?" Shayne asked the FBI agents.

"They trolled the man through shark waters." It was Agent Florsheim who answered. "What's out there is what the sharks didn't eat."

V

WHEN THEY reached the luxur-

THE NOTE given Mike by Catherine Voelker now had a new signifi-

cance. *Call police, we feed them to the sharks.* Mike guessed whoever had held Goodman and was still holding Cassie Voelker—God willing—was somewhere at sea.

"You fellows should have this run through your lab," Shayne said, handing the note he had carried in his pocket to Agent Rubin. "I'd guess it was probably typed on a typewriter with the U missing, probably a portable."

Rubin was fingering the paper. "One hundred percent rag." He handed the note to Florsheim. "That missing letter could be faked."

"Not probable," Mike Shayne said. "I'd guess the paper is part of someone's letterhead."

"The kidnappers couldn't be that dumb," Agent Florsheim told Shayne.

The redhead shrugged. A theory was beginning to take shape in his mind that he didn't want to share with the FBI. He had proper respect for that branch of the Department of Justice, but disdain for the way red tape swathed their field men and prevented them from taking shortcuts to solve crimes.

Rubin and Florsheim would be setting up phone watches at the Palm Beach house and on the yacht in order to record all incoming calls and make voice prints. They'd also try to trace any calls received from the kidnappers.

Senior Agent Rubin warned him about withholding any information he might have about the crime. "We'll get your license and nail you to the wall, Shayne, if you've got anything we need to know," was the way he put it. "Now we're taking charge your best bet would be to throw in your hand and stand clear."

"Is that advice or a threat?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Advice," Rubin admitted.

"Threat or advice, I'm hanging in," the detective said in a flat voice. "I'm going after the crumbs who fed Gussie Goodman to the sharks. That's one hell of a way to make their point."

"Endanger the woman they have and you'll be doing hard time in a federal slammer," Rubin warned.

"See you boys around," Mike Shayne said. He went to find Bennett Voelker.

In the living room, Catherine sat primly on a couch, her eyes red and swollen from crying. "Daddy is with mother," she told the detective. "They don't want to be disturbed."

Catherine's face was haggard, and she seemed to be dazed, almost in shock. She was reacting, Shayne thought, as if her sister were out there on the front lawn, under a sheet, instead of the man she claimed that she despised. She had called him a *baseball jock* and a *creep*, yet Goodman

had been in therapy with her for at least a year.

Patients, he knew, often fell in love with their therapists. It would be safe to assume that it could be the other way around. He decided to find out exactly how Catherine Voelker felt toward the late Gussie Goodman. He knew it was brutal to attack when the psychologist was so vulnerable, but necessary.

"Let's find out how you really felt about Gussie Goodman," he said. "Was he the first man in your life that Cassandra stole?"

Catherine stared at Shayne, tight-lipped.

"I can find out easily enough," he said, "but time is of essence, so level with me, Catherine."

"You can go to hell!" she flared.

She had told him what he needed to know.

"I've been advised to fire you off this case, Shayne," Bennett Voelker told Shayne, "but I'm not taking that advice. If anything should happen to Cassie, I'm afraid it will drive Diane over the brink into insanity—and I don't want that. I still love my wife. This terrible situation has brought us together again. I'm moving from here to our Palm Beach house."

They were talking in Voelker's cabin office aboard the yacht.

Mike Shayne nodded. "Good idea. Your wife and daughter are going to need a husband and

father on the premises for the next few days. Do you have the letterheads for all your companies here?"

Voelker's was a puzzled frown. "I suppose I have."

"Let me have one of each."

Voelker rummaged in the drawers of his desk. "What are you trying to prove?" he asked.

"I want to *disprove* something," the detective said.

"Here you are." Voelker handed a thin sheaf of letterheads across the desk.

Mike Shayne folded them and tucked the letterheads away in the breast pocket of his sports coat. He got up to leave. "I'll stay in touch with my office," he told Voelker, "When you get a call about the ransom, contact my secretary if you still want me as the go-between. They may name their own."

"Whatever you're planning to do, don't endanger Cassie's life, Shayne," Voelker ordered.

"I plan to save her life," Shayne told his client. "The modern trend in kidnapping is to collect and then blow away the victim."

Voelker winced. "Did you have to remind me of that?"

Away from the marina, the redhead pulled into a service station to use the public phone. "Hello, Angel," he said when Lucy Hamilton answered at the office. "I want you to get in touch with Tim Rourke. Tell him there's a rumor that Gussie Goodman

has been found murdered, and to get in touch with the Fort Lauderdale police for confirmation."

"Oh, *Mike!*" Lucy was obviously distressed.

"He's already got background info for any story he writes, which will leave him one up on the other news media," the redhead told her. "So get him to cough up to you what he's found out. I'll be in touch."

His next call was the number listed for Dr. Catherine Voelker's office. There was no answer, at the office, but an answering service cut in.

He hung up.

He realized that on this fast-breaking case he had neglected to get one basic piece of information—he did not know where the Goodmans were supposed to have gone on their honeymoon. He found the listing in the classified for the Goodman Fruit Juice Company. When that number answered, he asked for Harold Faulkner, Gussie Goodman's partner. Shayne refused to give him name.

"Who is this?" a querulous voice asked when the detective had been put on to Faulkner. "If you're a bill collector you're wasting your time with me. Goodman is the partner you want to talk with, and he's on vacation."

"Goodman just won a bundle," Shayne said in a husky voice. "We want to pay him."

"Oh, you're his bookie," Faulkner said in a relieved voice.

"Gussie is on his honeymoon."

"Where can I reach him?" the redhead asked.

"You can't," Faulkner assured him. "He and Mrs. Goodman rented a yacht in Key West and are cruising somewhere in the Gulf. I'll give him your message when he gets back."

VI

A BLOCK AFTER he left the service station Mike Shayne realized he had picked up a tail. He circled a block and drove back in the direction from which he had come. The unmarked Buick sedan with its tell-tale whip aerial was just turning into the side street he had taken to get off the main highway.

FBI was his best guess. He parked and waited for the car to catch up. When it did, he flagged the two agents down.

"Samples for Rubin," he said when he got out of his car to reach the other Buick. He gave them the letterheads in his pocket. Both men were young and obviously just out of the FBI Academy. "Didn't he tell you?"

"No, Mr. Shayne," the driver said in an embarrassed voice.

"Some mix-up—probably my fault," the redhead said. "I was going to mail them, then decided he probably wants them right away to check with the note. Run them to him, will you? I

want to get down the road toward Miami Beach."

Mike Shayne watched them drive off, then headed for the address of the professional building where Catherine Voelker had her offices. It was a neat Spanish type office in a smart neighborhood. He left his car in the parking lot and found Catherine's office was on the third floor. He walked up instead of taking the self-service elevator.

It was only a few minutes' work to pick the lock and slip into the deserted foyer of the office. The lock on the file drawer gave him some trouble, but it finally succumbed. Catherine kept her case histories neatly filed. He pulled the folder for Gus Goodman, and sat down at Catherine's desk to thumb through it.

Gus had seen Catherine twice a month for the year preceding his marriage to Cassandra, and the woman psychologist's neat notes after each sessions indicated a man striving to overcome twin addictions, alcohol and gambling. Shayne wondered if Catherine herself realized how much her notes gave away about the therapist.

As Gussie Goodman revealed himself to her in visit after visit, Catherine's notes became longer and more involved. From clinical detachment they became more warmly personal. Toward the end of the year, the pair had dated.

The final line in the case history was, *Today interrupted by sweet Cassie, damn her!*

Shayne replaced the folder in the file, locked the cabinet, and left the office. On the way, he noticed on Catherine's secretary's desk in the foyer a blank sheet of paper. It was, he recognized, identical to the sheets in the case history.

When he held it up to the light he discovered it was watermarked 100% Rag Bond. The watermark was below the center of the sheet. He folded the sheet and put it into his breast pocket.

A cursory search discovered no typewriter, portable or otherwise, with a missing U.

In the parking lot, Shayne checked out his Buick, then headed south again. This time there was no car on his tail. The vague outlines of a pattern were beginning to form a picture. On the road, he stopped at a diner for coffee and a sandwich. Waiting for his order, he phoned Lucy.

"Hi, Sweetheart, what's coming down?" he asked.

"The roof," she told him. "FBI with a search warrant are in your office right now. Lauderdale's Chief of Police just ate me out because we tipped Tim about Goodman's murder. They were trying to hush it up at the request of the FBI.

"Michael, you're in trouble. The FBI snoops here have me on the grid. They seem to think we

had something to do with the kidnapping and murder." She laughed nervously. "Do we need us a mouthpiece?"

"Not yet, Angel," he said cheerfully. "Do you have what I wanted?"

"Yes."

"Save it," Shayne said. He gave her the number from which he was calling, then hung up.

He had finished his roast beef on rye sandwich when the diner pay phone rang. "I've got it," he told the waitress, and left a dollar tip on the counter. "Lucy?" he said when he took the phone off the hook.

"None other," she said. "Gussie Goodman was in hock up to his ears with just about every bookie joint in Miami Beach and Miami. This phone booth is a sweatbox! Anyway, the story Tim got is that everyone would be paid off as soon as he returned from his honeymoon.

"Why don't they ventilate these booths better? Whoever made the last call was fond of garlic and onions. Speaking of which, Eddie Savanarola has been picking up Gussie Goodman's markers."

"That figures," Shayne said.

Eddie Savanarola was a shadowy figure in the Miami Beach and Miami area, reputed to be the bookies' bookmaker. They laid off excess action to him. The redhead knew the man only by reputation, but what he did know was favorable.

"To keep the record straight, Angel," he told Lucy, "Savanarola's real name is Eddie Duggan. Do this for me. Call Will Gentry and find out if Eddie is reputed to have any syndicate connections. I've heard that he hasn't."

Will Gentry was Miami Beach's chief of police, and a long-time friend of Shayne's.

"You might also have him put in a word for me with the FBI," he told Lucy. "How did they make out with their search warrant?"

"They're still trying to figure out your filing system, Michael. I told them, if they succeeded, to let me in on the secret."

Shayne laughed. "Some rainy afternoon, I'll explain it to you. You'd better get out of that booth before you melt."

"My mascara is running already," Lucy said. "Where are you bound?"

"Key West, off the record."

"Take care of yourself, Michael."

"I always do, Hon," he said. "I'll call you at home tonight."

"If I'm not there, try the jail," Lucy told him in a cheerful voice. "I may be booked as your accomplice."

"If you land in jail we'll give you hardship pay," Shayne told her. "You can buy a new dress."

"Thanks a heap, Michael! Why don't we ever get simple open-and-shut cases?"

"Hold the thought," he said. "It might just happen. At least

nobody but the FBI has tried to warn me off this one."

"Somebody will," Lucy promised. "Can I go back to the office now?"

"Last year we did an investigation for the Mutual Indemnity Company of Florida," he said.

"I don't remember that one."

"That woman who was supposed to have drowned in the bathtub? Her husband filed for double indemnity. We located his current girlfriend and found out a former wife of his went the same route."

"Oh, yes. You found the girlfriend quite a dish as I remember."

"Forget that," he told her, "and try to remember which vice president called us in."

"James Merson. He was cute."

"Good bye."

Mike Shayne next called Mutual Indemnity and asked for James Merson. "What can I do for you, Shayne?" Merson asked when the switchboard put Mike through. "We have a new accident policy for the active man."

"I don't need insurance," the detective said.

Merson laughed. "Kidding, Shayne. Your line of work puts you in a high risk category where we don't write coverage. You need some information, I'd guess."

"Yes—Goodman Fruit Juice Company. The partners are Harold Faulkner and Gus Goodman. Do they carry partnership

insurance with your company, Mr. Merson?"

"Hold a minute." Shayne could hear Merson calling for a file. "Do you want to tell me why the interest?" The insurance man asked while a clerk was getting what he wanted.

"You'll catch it in the news," the redhead said. "Gussie Goodman has been murdered."

"I hope it isn't our coverage," Merson said. "Thank you," Shayne heard him tell someone. "Now let's see. Goodman Fruit Juice Company?"

"Right."

James Merson sighed. "Here it is. Two hundred—grand to the surviving partner." The detective heard the rustle of paper. "No double indemnity clause, thank God for small favors. You did say Goodman has been murdered?"

"Right. Thanks for the information, Mr. Merson."

"Thank you, Shayne."

"Anytime," the redhead said and hung up.

VII

BEFORE DRIVING on down to Key West, he stopped at his apartment for a shower, a drink and a change of clothes. On the hall table, he found a search warrant obtained by the FBI. They had been neat about it, but the apartment had been tossed.

Mike Shayne had learned long ago to leash his volatile temper,

but he was hot, tired, needed a drink and a shower. When the FBI phone in Fort Lauderdale was answered, he snapped, "Give me Rubin."

"And what did you want to speak with Special Agent Rubin about?" a courteous young man's voice asked.

"Give me Rubin," the redhead repeated, trying to keep his voice even.

"May we have your name, sir?"

"Judge Crater," Shayne snapped.

"You're a federal judge?" The young man was puzzled.

"No. I disappeared under mysterious circumstances in New York about forty years ago. Now let me talk to Rubin."

Rubin came on with the voice he reserved for callers claiming to be Napoleon or Jesus Christ. "Special Agent Rubin, Federal Bureau of Investigation here. How can I help you, sir?"

"You can get the hell off my back, Rubin, and stuff your search warrants," Mike Shayne exploded. "Play footsie with the Voelkers as long as you want, but don't try to tie my hands or include me on your list of suspects. Haven't you ever heard of harassment? You and your tame judge might be surprised at what a stink I'm going to raise if you don't quit this cat and mouse caper."

"Shayne." Rubin spoke his name as if that explained everything.

"Mister Shayne to you, public servant."

"Look, Mr. Shayne, please try to understand my position," Rubin said in a conciliatory voice.

"Regulations require us to explore every possible channel in a case of this magnitude. I have to follow orders. I'm sorry if we've embarrassed you in any way, and it won't happen again. I've heard from Chief Will Gentry. You're in the clear, Mr. Shayne."

Mike's flash of temper had run its course.

"Thanks, Rubin."

You forgot one bit while telling me off, Mr. Shayne," Rubin said.

"Did I?"

"Yes. You forgot to tell me that you pay my salary," Rubin said.

The detective laughed. "I got tired of that line when I was a beat cop once upon a time. When you come down to Miami Beach let me buy you a drink."

"You've got it, Mike," Rubin said.

Mike decided on a good night's sleep before driving down to Key West. He set his alarm for an early start. The note pinned to Gussie Goodman's mutilated corpse, threatening death for Cassie if the ransom wasn't paid in hours, was a puzzle, since no payoff had been set up. He had called Lucy Hamilton and there was no word from Bennett Voelker.

More than a hundred keys stretch from the tip of mainland

Florida to Key West along the U.S. #1 causeway. If Cassie were being held aboard a ship or boat, it would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

But Shayne had a hunch that Cassie was no longer being held at sea. Goodman promising to pay off all his gambling markers when he returned from his honeymoon smacked of a hoax to defraud Bennett Voelker. Goodman was now murdered. His partner, Harold Faulkner, was \$200,000 richer. It was probably enough money to bail out the Goodman Fruit Juice Company.

Catherine Voelker was the wild card. Sister Cassie had taken Gussie Goodman away from Catherine. Women like Catherine, scorned, were capable of murder.

Shayne woke up at three, an hour before his alarm clock would have chimed, and fixed a quick breakfast before starting the .156 mile drive down U.S. #1 to Key West.

Key West, a scant hundred miles from Cuba, had long been one of his favorite vacation haunts. Once Florida's largest city, settled in the 1600's by Spanish adventurers, and a notorious pirate port, he found Key West unique with its fishing wharves and tropical foliage. Deep sea fishing was Shayne's favorite sport, and he had sailed often from Key West with Captain Johnnie Lopez.

When he arrived in Key West, the redhead looked up Lopez

aboard his sports fisher, the *Sea Naiad*.

Lopez was busy on the forward deck coiling ropes when Mike walked out on the wharf. "Permission to come aboard, Johnnie," he called.

The stocky little man with a brush haircut looked up, and his leathery face split in a delighted grin. "*Mike Shayne!* You come to fish?"

Shayne stepped aboard the *Sea Naiad*. "Not this time," he said. "I need your help."

"You have it, good friend," Lopez said, coming aft to wring his visitor's hand in a strong, callused grip. "You are working, no?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "You know everybody in Key West, and what goes on here in the harbor."

Lopez shrugged. "One notices."

"A honeymoon couple rented a yacht," the redhead prompted.

Lopez nodded. "*The Sea Waif*." "Who's the skipper?" Shayne asked.

"Pete Fortner. But it is curious. They bring their own crew. Three men. For to do this they pay Pete extra money. Very pretty woman is the bride. They rent the *Sea Waif* for two weeks, but she is over there now." Lopez pointed across the harbor. "You see the one?"

"Yes." Shayne nodded. "She needs paint."

"Pete is broke," Lopez said.

"These three men who took her out, were they locals, Johnnie?"

"Only one, Bob Rinaldo. The other two didn't look like they knew bow from stern about boats," Lopez said. "Where they came from, who knows? What are you working on, Mike?"

"I'm not sure yet. Where can I find this Bob Rinaldo?"

"That one drinks a lot since he lost his boat three—maybe four—months ago. The feds nabbed him coming into Key Largo with a ton of marijuana, and they got his boat. Lots of smuggling going on these days, Mike. Big profits unless you get caught, like Rinaldo did. He's out on bail these days."

"And anxious to make a fast buck," said Shayne. "Any idea in what bar I might find him?"

Lopez scratched his head. "Try the Sea Maiden, down by the shrimp docks. He can be a very bad boy, Mike, so watch your step."

"I always do," Shayne assured Lopez. "It keeps me alive. Thanks, Johnnie."

"No charge." Lopez shrugged his shoulders. "You come to fish next time, yes? Last week a man from Chicago landed a four-hundred-pound swordfish off my boat."

"How long did he have to fight him before brining him to gaff?"

"Three hours and a little more. One damned fine fish, that one."

"I'd give my eyeteeth to land one like that," the detective admitted. "I'll be down as soon as I get a break in routine."

THE SEA MAIDEN was a scruffy sidestre^t bar near the shrimp docks. It was early afternoon and nearly empty when Shayne walked in. He ordered a beer, and lit a cigarette. Two women were drinking up at one end of the bar. Three shrimpers were playing dominoes in one of the booths. Otherwise, Mike and the bartender were the only others in the Sea Maiden.

The bartender was a hatchet-faced man who combed lank black hair over his bald spot. His apron was dirty. He drew Shayne a beer and shoved it across the scarred surface of the bar.

"I'm looking for Bob Rinaldo," the redhead said.

"Yeah?" The bartender looked the big redhead up and down. "You a cop?"

"Not guilty. Does he come in here often?"

"You ain't asked if I know Rinaldo."

"Do you?"

The bartender shook his head. "I don't know you, either."

Mike Shayne's right hand shot out to grab the bartender's shirt. He jerked the man against the bar. "I've asked nice," he said. "Now I'm beginning to feel very nasty." He hoisted the bartender onto his toes. "Will ten dollars refresh your memory?"

"Yeah, pal—yeah, sure," the bartender sputtered. "He rents a

room just down the street when he's ashore, which ain't too often. I ain't seen Bob since he took on a load yesterday afternoon. Maybe you can find him in his room."

Shayne released his handful of shirt, and laid a ten-dollar bill on the bar. "Thanks."

"Ain't you going to finish your beer?"

"Where is this room?" Shayne asked.

"Over the Mom and Pop grocery store on the next corner towards the docks," the bartender said.

There was a narrow stairway flanking the grocery store that led to the rented room above it. The redhead took the stairs and rapped on the door, but there was no answer.

Shayne picked the lock, and eased into the darkened room with drawn shades. The bed was unmade, and cast-off clothing littered the floor. He made out the broad shoulders of a man, head down on the kitchen table.

"Rinaldo?"

The slumped figure did not move. Shayne picked his way through the litter of soiled clothing, to shake Rinaldo's shoulder. "Wake up."

The big man toppled from the chair to the floor, and the detective saw why. He had been shot between the eyes with a small caliber weapon, probably a .22 automatic. The body was limp. Rigor mortis had come and gone.

Probably dead twelve or more hours, Shayne thought. Whoever had shot Rinaldo was someone he knew and trusted, because he had been sitting across the small table from the dead man.

The redhead tiptoed from the room, and down the narrow flight of stairs. These days, he knew, hit men preferred the .22 caliber weapon because it made less noise, especially with a silencer, and killed just as effectively as a .38 or .45 with less mess. Back on the street, he found his parked Buick and drove to the Seaside Motel to check in.

Loosening his tie, he sat on the bed and called Lucy Hamilton. "Have we heard from Voelker, Angel?"

"Yes. Michael, he says to tell you the payoff will be to one of those Swiss numbered bank accounts. He's going to arrange it through the Paris office of one of his companies."

"What assurance does he have that Cassie is still alive?" Shayne asked.

"They put her on the phone."

"Where are they going to release her, Lucy?"

"They won't say."

Great! "Now I want you to do something for me. Call the police here in Key West and tell them where they'll find a body." He gave her the address. "Keep the call anonymous."

He found a Peter Fortner in the book, and dialed his number. A

woman answered and told Mike her husband had gone up to Fort Lauderdale on business. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm interested in chartering the *Sea Waif*," he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Mrs. Fortner said. "It's already under charter by a couple on their honeymoon."

"It's tied up," Mike said.

"Perhaps the bride got seasick."

"Does the yacht have a ship to shore telephone on board?" he asked.

"Of course. What is your name? I'll have Pete get in touch when he returns from Lauderdale."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fortner," he said, and hung up.

Rinaldo, Shayne reasoned, had been killed because he had witnessed the murder of Gussie Goodman. The two other men, from Johnnie's description, sounded like hoods, professionals. They had probably promised Rinaldo hush money, then paid him off with a bullet in the head.

Someone with a numbered Swiss bank account was giving orders.

Shayne was certain that Casandra Voelker was still aboard the *Sea Waif*, and that he'd have to move fast. But first he phoned Bennett Voelker at his Palm Beach home.

"Shayne here," he said. "I have the word about the payoff to a Swiss account. Have you made the arrangements yet?"

"I'm working on them," Voelker said.

"Don't transfer that money until you hear from me, Voelker. Do it, and your daughter is dead."

"Now look here, Shayne!"

"Let me handle this, Mr. Voelker," Rubin's voice cut in from an extension phone. "Shayne..."

Mike hung up.

He left the motel to drive around the harbor to the dock where he had last seen the *Sea Waif*, arriving to find the yacht just putting out to sea. Taking time to goad the Coast Guard into action would seal Cassie's fate. The men aboard would deep-six the woman without any compunctions.

He raced his Buick back to the *Sea Naiad's* dock to find Johnnie Lopez securing his sports fisher for the night. He jumped to the forward deck.

"Come on, Johnnie, cast off," he urged.

"You crazy, man?" Johnnie asked. "Fish out there ain't biting tonight."

The detective pointed to the *Sea Waif*. "We've got to follow her," he said. "I'll answer questions when we're under way."

Shayne's desperate determination galvanized the skipper of the *Sea Naiad* into action. Within minutes, the sports fisher was plowing along in the wake of the yacht.

Mike Shayne had his .45 in its shoulder holster. In a rack on the

bridge was a .30-.30 rifle to use on sharks. Like every fishing skipper, Lopez purely hated the snakes of the sea!

Lopez had the wheel and the throttle. He was caught up in the excitement of the chase. Mike Shayne was beside him, studying the *Sea Waif* with binoculars. The sun was down. So far as he could tell, no one aboard the yacht was particularly interested in the *Sea Naiad*. So far, so good.

Both boats had cleared the harbor entrance. There was an oily swell and low overcast. "The weather, she will change tonight, Mike," Johnnie said. "The barometer is headed for the cellar. Maybe you tell me why we are doing this?"

"A woman is captive aboard that yacht, Johnnie. It's a kidnapping caper. If we don't get her off before the payoff, she's dead," the redhead told him.

Johnnie considered what Shayne had just said with a frown. "How do we do that?" he asked. "The two I told you about are on board, plus another."

"A skipper?"

"Must be," Johnnie said. "Bob Rinaldo maybe."

"Rinaldo's dead," Shayne said. "One of his pals put a bullet through his head."

Lopez shrugged and crossed himself. "No great loss."

"Do we have as much freeboard as the yacht?" Shayne asked

Johnnie nodded. "Just about.

Our deck pretty much level with hers. But you're crazy, Mike, if you think you can board out here at sea."

Shayne smiled tightly. "I've been told that before, but I'm still here. Do you have a better idea?"

Johnnie's face was screwed up in thought. "It is a dark night coming," he said. "They don't run without lights, I'll bet. We do. You don't want them to know we chase, right?"

"You've got it."

"So, okay. Who pay for the repairs on my boat if we ram?"

"It goes down on my expense account to Bennett Voelker," Shayne said. "You're covered."

Johnnie slapped Mike's shoulder. "We do it then."

"What if we sink her?"

"Pete's insured."

"What if the *Sea Naiad* goes down, too?"

"My good friend, you worry too much," Johnnie said.

The yacht was barely in sight.

Johnnie speeded up the sports fisher, then swung her three points to starboard. He crossed himself again. "Know something, Shayne?"

"What?"

"Lopez is crazy as you, my friend."

IX

A GUST OF wind struck the *Sea Naiad* and caused the boat to heel. Rain splashed the deck and the

windshield but had stopped by the time Johnnie snapped on the wipers. He let them clear the glass, then shut them off. The oily swells were becoming choppy little waves. Shayne spread his feet and braced himself as the sports fisher began to rise and fall.

"What's the weather report?" he asked.

"Nothing big, just squalls," Johnnie said. He patted the dashboard. "This old lady rode out a hurricane once. Weather don't sink her."

"I'm encouraged," the redhead said, his voice dry. He took a deep breath. "Look, Johnnie. I have a better idea than ramming. Pull on ahead of the yacht and I'll drop off. I noticed a ladder over the side before it got too dark."

Lopez looked at Shayne as if the big detective had lost his mind. "You miss grabbing that ladder, what you do then?"

"I won't miss if you handle this boat right."

"*Mama mia!*" Johnny slapped his forehead. "*If you handle this boat right!*" he mocked. "You get drowned, it's my fault."

"You can do it," the detective assured him. "Anyway, if I miss, you can pick me up, and we'll try it one more time."

"You miss, man, and how do I find you?" Johnnie asked. "She's one damned big ocean."

Mike Shayne stripped off his sports coat, and kicked off his

loafers. He unstrapped the shoulder holster to remove his shirt, then ducked into it again, making sure the .45 was secure in the holster clips. He stepped out of his trousers.

"Now it's up to you to say when," he told Johnnie. "I'll drop off the stern."

"Okay, okay." Johnnie Lopez was reconciled. "We're on her beam now, running dark, maybe three hundred yards out." He fiddled with the throttle until the sports fisher paced the yacht. "Fifteen knots—we can do twenty." He advanced the throttle and Shayne heard the twin diesels pick up their beat. "You got a lot of damned nerve, Mike."

From the way his stomach felt, the redhead wondered about that.

MIKE SHAYNE LOST AT SEA—Tim Rourke would make the first page with that story. Further details buried somewhere in the *Miami Daily News*, further back in the paper each succeeding day.

For two thousand and expenses, Johnnie is right. I'm crazy to try this, Mike thought. But he knew he was going to do it."

He looked back and could see the yacht's running lights directly on their port quarter.

"You going?" Johnnie asked. "Damned right!"

"Okay. Get aft. When I stop the engines, get wet. You miss that damned ladder, Shayne, get clear

fast. Them damned screws chop you up into shark bait. I circle and lay in her wake. *Hey!* Can you swim good?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "But thanks for asking."

He padded aft along the narrow sidedeck until he was in the stern of the sports fisher. The sea was beginning to make up, and spray whipped across the deck.

The engines throbbed to a stop.

Mike Shayne took a deep breath and plunged into the water. He was clear. He heard the sports fisher's diesels throb into life again.

The Gulf Stream water was warm, nearly tepid. He saw the *Sea Waif's* red port and green starboard running lights heading directly toward him. It was going to be a matter of split-second timing not to be run over and drowned by the yacht, yet to be close enough to grab the dangling ladder . . . if it was still over the side . . .

The beam of the searchlight above the yacht's bridge swept over Mike's head to pick out and focus on Johnnie's sports fisher. The *Sea Naiad's* running lights flashed on, and Johnnie signaled with hurried flashes from the bridge: S-O-R-R-Y. The spotlight winked out. Shayne breathed again.

The prow was bearing down on him, faster than he would have believed. He had to kick and stroke frantically to stay clear;

then lunge toward the ladder. He caught the bottom rung, to find the slipstream of the yacht battering him against its side. It took every ounce of strength he could muster to pull himself out of the water, and scramble up the ladder, to swing over the railing.

"Some drunk fisherman running dark," he heard a voice say on the bridge.

"Maybe Cubans?" another voice asked.

"Could be." The first voice again. "Tony, take a look at the chick, but hands to yourself."

"What's the difference?" a hoarse voice asked.

"The money, you damned fool!" The second voice. "It ain't in Switzerland yet. We may have to rough her up enough to do some screaming if we have to prove she's alive again."

"My pleasure," Tony said.

Mike Shayne flattened into a recessed companionway. He peered forward, to see a stocky man, with his cigar at a jaunty angle, climb down the bridge ladder and start coming aft. Shayne rose to the balls of his feet and cocked his right arm.

Unsuspecting Tony never knew what hit him. The cigar shot over the side. The redhead's flat judo stroke to Tony's throat silenced the man, so when he grabbed his ankles and hoisted him over the rail, there was only a splash, partially drowned by the sound of rushing water.

"One down," Shayne muttered.

Cassie was somewhere aft. He slipped along the deck and ducked into the aft cabin. A narrow passageway ran forward, with a stateroom on either side. He opened the door into the port cabin first. It was empty but the two bunks were unmade, and the close air stank of cigar smoke. He moved across the narrow passageway and eased the door into the starboard cabin open.

They had stripped the slender blonde to her slip before dumping her into the bottom bunk, and tied her wrists to the rail of the top bunk.

"Don't! Please don't!" Cassie could only whimper.

"Don't be afraid of me, Cassie." Mike Shayne made his voice as reassuring as he could under the circumstances. "Your Daddy sent me. We're going to get you out of this." His big hands were busy fumbling with the cords binding her wrists. "Don't jerk your arms. Lie still, Cassie."

Mike had her wrists free. He dropped down on his heels to whisper, while Cassie massaged the blood flow back into her hands.

"The one called Tony is over the side, Cassie. The two others are still aboard. Do you know who they are?"

The woman's eyes in the half-darkness glistened with fear, and she didn't answer.

When he reached to brush back blonde hair out of her face, Cassie

threw herself back against the bulkhead, whimpering, "Please don't!"

Naked except for his shorts Mike realized he was terrorizing the young woman. "All right, Cassie, I'm going to leave you now. Can you bolt the door after me?"

She nodded, her first response. But she still cowered, wide-eyed with fear, against the bulkhead. He took the blanket from the bunk.

In the narrow passageway, he waited until he heard the bolt shot home, then retreated to the stern. The recessed companionway from which Mike had subdued Tony evidently led to a forward cabin, probably the galley and dining area. He slipped forward to this companionway, and lay in wait for whoever came aft to look for Tony when he was missed.

"John, what the hell do you think Tony is doing with that broad?" It was the second voice Shayne had heard as he climbed aboard.

"God damnit, Doug, he's *your* partner," John snarled. "They brought me down from Jersey to drive this boat. I take orders, but I don't like this whole loused-up deal. Go back there and find out."

"The hell you say."

The gusty wind squalls had built into a stiff wind that had the yacht rolling and pitching, with spray showering back. The redhead had to brace to keep from following Tony over the side. The creaking

timbers of the tortured yacht nearly drowned out the wisps of conversation from the bridge.

"... don't pull rank on *me*!"

That was John.

"Up..."

"Get... back there!"

The detective lost Doug's rankled answer. He realized that John, the imported skipper, was swinging the yacht around to breast incoming seas.

Mike Shayne drew his .45 and swathed his wrist and hand with the blanket while he waited. He didn't have long to wait. The man who climbed down from the bridge, shivering in a windbreaker jacket and cursing under his breath, staggered back along the sidedeck.

Shayne out, jammed the muzzle of his .45 into a paunchy midriff and pulled the trigger. The impact of the slug knocked Doug backwards. Holstering his weapon, Shayne caught him under the armpits, and lifted him over the rail, throwing the blanket into the sea after him.

Then he padded forward and up the bridge ladder. The man at the helm was bald and burly, dressed in dungarees and a faded denim jacket. His back was to Shayne and he was intent on steering. "This is shaping into a real blow," he said without glancing over his shoulder. "Didn't take you long."

Mike Shayne jabbed the back of John's neck with the muzzle of his .45. "Don't look now, friend, but

I'm about to blow your head off."

John stiffened.

"Head back toward Key West and I may change my mind," the detective said. "It's up to you."

John held the yacht steady.

"I'll count," Mike said.

He hung back, so a flailing elbow couldn't knock him off balance, and if John made a move toward the shark rifle racked just above his head, he'd keep his promise.

"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five..."

"Who are you?" John asked, stiff-lipped.

"Four, three, two..."

X

JOHN STARTED bringing the bow around. Mike Shayne reached over his head and snatched the shark rifle. He dropped it at his feet. "You're smart," he complimented. "Now get this boat in high gear."

Instead of reaching for the throttle, John dropped to his knees, and snapped his head back into Mike's crotch. In a spasm of sickening pain the redhead jerked the trigger of the .45 involuntarily, and the yacht's windshield cracked. He aimed a wild swing with the automatic palmed at John's bald head—and missed.

John lunged up from his knees to catch Shayne in a bear-hug and drive him back across the sloping bridge. He slammed the detective

against a bulkhead.

Shayne drove up his knee, but missed again. The dropped .45 had skittered across the bridge. John's hands grabbed the red-head's throat. Shayne slammed a punch into the frantic man's side. He found himself nose to nose with a man fighting for his life. Tenting his hands, the detective broke the grip on his windpipe when he broke them apart, but John was an accomplished alley fighter. He clawed for the eyes. Shayne ducked. Both men were staggering and off balance on the bridge of the pitching yacht with nobody at the helm.

John's mistake was in making a scrambling grab for the shark rifle. Mike Shayne drove a bare foot into his rump that shot him back across the bridge, just as the deck tilted. John's bald head hit the opposite bulkhead.

John was stunned. The yacht, with the helm unminded, was veering crazily as waves battered the rudder as if it was a shuttlecock. Keeping his eyes fixed on John, teetering to keep his balance, Shayne retrieved his .45 and snapped the slide. The shell in the chamber bounced on the steel deck. No chance now it might jam.

John was trying to pull himself to his feet. While he fought the wheel with his left hand, Shayne kept John covered with the Colt in his right fist. From the cut on his head, trickles of blood ran down John's temples and cheeks, in the

green dashlight of the bridge looking much like the side curls of an orthodox Jew. The man's mouth was open, and his breathing was heavy.

Half-shut eyes stared at the detective much as a bull's eyes stare at the man tormenting him in the ring. But there was respect in them.

The shark rifle lay on the tilting deck between them, moving slightly each time the yacht pitched or yawed.

"Right now, I'd rather not blow a hole in your guts, John," Shayne said in an even voice. He moved so one bare foot covered the shark rifle. "Get us back on course, will you?"

John nodded, licking at the blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. By the time he had edged past the detective to take the wheel, Shayne had scooped up the shark rifle. Now, with his shoulders against a bulkhead and bare feet braced on the deck, Mike tucked the .45 into the waistband of his shorts and worked the rifle bolt until the magazine was empty.

John watched from the corner of an eye, his hands full with the kicking wheel.

Shayne stacked the rifle in a corner of the wheelhouse, but the next lurch of the yacht dropped it on his toes.

"Damn it!" He shoved the rifle halfway across the bridge with his heel.

"On course for Key West," John reported in a toneless voice. "What next?"

"How did a nice strongarm like you get in a mess like this?" Mike asked. "Breaking arms and legs for loan sharks is your regular racket up there in Jersey, isn't it?"

"Hell, man, I give that up years ago. From the merchant marine I got a thing for boats like this. The organization can use good skippers, what with Mary Jane to be brought in by the ton, and Columbian Coke."

"Interested in a deal?" the detective asked.

John nodded, his eyes intent on the compass needle.

"You put in a word for the young woman back there," Shayne said. "That earns you a chance to make a deal in my book."

"You a private cop?" John asked.

"Right. Mike Shayne."

"What's the deal?"

"How much do you know about this kidnap attempt?"

"Only what I heard when I wasn't supposed to be listening. Tony and Doug are blown away, right?"

"You're right. Both over the side, Doug with a slug in him."

John seemed relieved. "I ain't got much to trade, Shayne," he warned. "Way I overheard, this cockamamie thing started with the broad and her husband

trying to shake down the broad's old man for a million. Amateur night!" he added, disgusted. "A third party enlisted Tony and Doug to help them. A guy with good racket contacts but not inside, you understand me?"

"So far," Mike said.

"So far—hell! That's all she wrote. I warned you I didn't have much of a hand. Now what's your part of a deal?"

"I don't turn you over to the Feds when we dock because I can't," Shayne said. "You got away and swam ashore. Only there's one more thing."

"Sure, there has to be," John said.

"This third party. You have enough larceny in your soul to consider the blackmail opportunity. So give."

"You're trying to squeeze blood from a turnip," John complained. "I only know what they called him."

"Doug and Tony?"

"Right. That Tony, he was smart, read books, that sort of schmaltz. He handled the back and forth with this third party."

"Give me a name, John."

"Okay. Snopes. Mr. Snopes," John said. "Doug asked about the name. Tony told him it come out of a book."

"It isn't one hell of a lot, John."

"It's all I got."

Dead ahead, they saw red and green running lights. Shayne reached for the switch, and

focussed the spotlight on the transom of the *Sea Naiad*. Mike blinked *O-K* with the spotlight, then, *L-E-A-D U-S I-N*.

Johnnie winked his running lights to acknowledge the message.

Cassie in the bolted 'aft state-room would have to wait until the *Sea Waif* was inside the Key West harbor. Maybe it served her *right*, he thought.

XI

SHAYNE HAD DONE his library work before he went up to Fort Lauderdale to collect his fee from Bennett Voelker. He had asked the man to have Special Agent Rubin aboard the *Cassiecat* when he arrived.

Cassandra Voelker was under the care of a psychiatrist recommended by Catherine. She was in a very expensive private hospital near Palm Beach. The FBI had waived their right to question her immediately on the advice of her psychiatrist.

Shayne had received a postcard from Jersey City with a telephone number on it. *Any time, I owe you.* No signature.

Bennett Voelker had bought a half interest in Fortner's *Sea Waif*, and she was drydocked for repairs, while Fortner and Voelker discussed a Rent-a-Yacht proposition.

Johnnie Lopez was \$3,000 richer, out of Shayne's pocket until the detective collected expenses

from Bennett Voelker.

Tim Rourke had a liberal bonus for his feature stories, from the mouth of the horse, as Tim put it.

Bennett and Diane Voelker were a discreet item in the social columns. A back-together-again, upbeat item to lard the run of separations, divorces and lawsuits of mate against mate.

When Mike Shayne came aboard the *Cassiecat* and found Voelker in his office, the older man spilled a liberal amount of Martell over ice cubes in a frosted glass.

"Rubin's on his way," he said. "Before he gets here, we'll settle your fee. Two grand and expenses doesn't cover what you've done for Diane and me, not to mention Cassie."

Shayne settled in his chair, nursing the frosted glass. "I named my own fee. I'll settle for two grand."

Voelker scribbled a check and handed it across his desk. Mike peered at the figure, \$25,000, then tore up the check.

Bennett Voelker stared at him.

"The amount is about right," the detective said, "but let's make it two checks. Five grand to me and the twenty-grand balance to the Miami Crippled Children's Society."

"Your favorite charity?"

Shayne nodded. "Yours too, now."

Voelker made out the separate checks.

Rubin joined them. "*Shayne!*" He settled in a chair. "Have you got any idea how much it hurts me, and the Bureau, to admit you did one hell of a job?"

The redhead grinned. "I've got salve for that hurt. You guys want the man or woman who plotted this whole thing, right?"

Rubin nodded and there was dead but intent silence in the yacht office.

Shayne rattled the ice cubes in his glass. "We know this started as . . ." Mike glanced at Bennett Voelker and saw the pain in his eyes. "Well, however it started, and I leave it to the FBI to work that side of the street, a mysterious third party with access to professional help took it over."

"We're working on that angle," Rubin said with a stubborn set to his jaw.

"This third party would have access to a numbered Swiss account. Blind alley for the FBI there."

"So far," Rubin agreed, "but we're working on it."

"Tony Salvori called him Snopes."

"Where did you get that?" Rubin demanded.

— "Not your business," Mike told him. "I happen to know what Mr. Snopes's real name is, and that he has business interests in Paris. I just found that out this morning from the financial editor of the *Miami Daily News*."

Bennet Voelker, fascinated,

came around the desk to pour more Martell for Mike.

"Tony was a thug and a reader. A few come that way."

Rubin nodded agreement.

"Okay. Tony nicknamed his source from books by one of his favorite authors."

Mike could see that neither Rubin nor Voelker knew the sagas of the Snopes family, or if they did, like himself, couldn't make the immediate connection.

"Faulkner wrote about the Mississippi Snopes family, fellows. Harold Faulkner stands to collect two hundred grand for having his partner murdered, and damn near collected a million-dollar bonus."

Mike saw the penny drop in Rubin's eyes. Bennett Voelker got it a second later. Shayne finished his drink in one long swallow, got up from his chair, and said, "Good day, gentlemen."

Walking down the gangplank, he joined Lucy Hamilton, who was waiting in his Buick. "How did it go?" she asked.

"Predictably," he said.

Lucy eyed the check. "Not enough for risking your neck, Michael."

"Bennett Voelker is a new contributor to our favorite charity, Angel. Now shall we enjoy a pre-honeymoon until the dust settles?"

"Another?" Lucy asked.

Mike Shayne ruffled her hair. "Who's counting?"

A TOUCH OF PARMIGIANA

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Alice Parker Knew for Years that Her Husband Was a Petty Crook—but She Kept the Knowledge to Herself until the Right Moment Arrived.

FROM HIS OFFICE underneath the red-neon motel sign, Parker watched the yellow sports car drive up. There were two people in it, and they looked young and golden. He gazed at them with fixed rheumy eyes, and his mouth began to water.

Money. He could almost taste it.

The man vaulted out of the car and strode into the office. He had curly blond hair, blue eyes and a small obstinate mouth. "You have a room?" he asked.

Parker put his hands on the arms of his chair and hauled up the fleshy blob of his body.

"Sure," he said. "Reckon we can fix you up. Just sign the register."

The man filled out the blank form and entered his name in a quick easy scrawl. Parker, squinting, could barely make out the signature. *Sanders*, it looked like. Came from out of state, same as the car.

"I got a nice quiet room," Parker said. Sanders was hardly listening, and Parker wondered how high he dared jack up the price. For people with expensive cars he usually added an extra few dollars, plus, when he thought he could get away with it, a non-existent tax of a dollar or so. And Sanders, the way he bounced in, and then that girl with him—Sanders would probably pay a top price and not even object.

"Forty dollars," he said. "Take Number Nine and park right in front of the door."

Sanders peeled off the bills from a sizeable roll, nodded and strode out. He was whistling as he got into the car, and the girl smiled at him. Parker exhaled his breath in a long, dreamy woosh. A girl like her . . .

Muttering to himself, Parker slogged back through the rear door. Alice, flapping around the kitchen in sandals that kept slip-

ping off her flat, veined feet, was stirring her usual Parmigiana sauce. Thirty years ago, when he made the mistake of marrying her, he had said he liked Parmigiana dishes, so she had learned how to make them.

The trouble was, she had never learned any other recipes. All she did now was cook the stuff, and she wasn't good for much else. She didn't help around the motel, didn't clean the rooms, didn't do anything—so what good was she?

Scowling, he thought for the thousandth time of ways of getting rid of her. He kept a gun in the night table alongside his bed, and he had a license for it, which he had bought after a series of local motel hold-ups. Still, how could a man shoot his wife and get away with it? In fact, no matter how he liquidated her, he'd be the prime suspect.

He supposed all his ideas for murder were just fantasy, but it was a fantasy he relished, even to the point of imagining what he'd do if the police ever questioned him. He had it all figured out—you don't have to answer questions if you don't want to, you can just sit there and shut up. Merely a matter of knowing your rights.

Alice, taking an eggplant from the vegetable bin, spoke to him without turning. "Somebody come?" she asked.

"Young couple," he answered.

"I put 'em in Nine."

She made no comment. She knew the rates were never posted in Nine, but he had never told her about the rest of it and he didn't think she was smart enough to guess. Still, he couldn't be sure, because she had gone through his desk while he'd been away.

It was a roll-top and he kept it locked, as well as the closet with all the motel records. Still, those cheesy red stains in his private account book were a definite giveaway Alice had somehow managed to open his desk.

He supposed it was foolish to keep complete records, but he liked to count his money, and it was amazing how little things added up. That tire racket, for instance—he used to let the air out of people's tires during the night, then next morning recommend the nearby gas station for fixing them, and later on he'd split the fee of "repairing." Over the years, he had picked up exactly \$905.75.

He sighed, thinking of the good old days. But he had something a lot better going for himself now. He had Room Nine.

"That young couple," he remarked to Alice, "they must have a lot of money. The car they're driving, that's a special job."

"So what are you going to do about them?" she asked.

He sniffed. "Cooking that

cheese stuff again?"

"You used to like it," she said.

"I used to like you, too," he said. He saw her wince, and he took advantage of his small victory by rubbing it in. "If it wasn't for this motel . . ." he added, and he left his sentence unfinished.

She sliced the eggplant and placed it in the casserole dish before she turned around and faced him. "I know why you put them in Nine," she said quietly. "And I could send you to jail for it."

"You wouldn't," he said coldly. "You need me to run this joint. Without me, you'd have to work." She didn't argue the point, and he went on angrily, "What makes you so cocky, threatening me?"

"I know what I know," she said darkly. Then he heard a car outside, and he waddled back to the office.

He was busy for the next few hours. He rented Number Seven three times and several other rooms twice, in addition to regular rentals for the whole night. Like he always did, he tore up all the second and third round registrations, just in case he got inspected.

It was past midnight when he switched on the NO VACANCY sign and decided to go to bed. He locked up the outer office, pulled down the shades and counted his money. Then he headed for his private office.

His mouth began watering in expectation of what he was going to hear, but it dried up when he saw a light under his door.

It had to be Alice in there, no question about it. Still, what was she doing in his private den?

He let his weight come down solidly with every step, to warn her he was coming and to give her a chance to put away whatever she was looking at. He had a feeling that she had decided on a showdown with him, and he had had a taste of those confrontations before. They weren't for him.

He flung the door open noisily and there she was, sitting at his desk. She had a bottom drawer open and she was using it as a footrest. The tape recorder, on the surface of the desk, was plugged in.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" Parker demanded.

"They went to bed," she said, shrugging. "Listen—you can hear her snoring." She pushed a button and the reel began to turn. The low, nasal snores came rhythmically.

"*Him*," Parker said. "That's him. A girl like her doesn't snore."

Alice puckered up her thick lips in contempt. Parker had to look away from her before he could speak.

"How long since you found

about this?" he asked.

"Since the week you bought it," she said. "And later on, I searched the rooms until I found the mike in Number Nine. It's hidden in that brass lamp, next to the bed."

"If I want to bug a room, that's my business."

"I know what you do. If a couple aren't married, if you get something on them, you follow them up and sometimes you manage to get a few dollars out of them. When you have the nerve."

"Sometimes I take pity on them."

"Pity?" she said. "You're just scared. Scared to ask, and scared to ask for too much. Scared to do anything big. But this time you're going to, because we really got something. Listen."

She pushed the *Rewind* button until the reel had reached a point near the beginning. Then she stopped the unwinding and pushed the *Play* button. Sander's voice spoke out clearly.

"Notice that big, fat slob of a proprietor?" Sanders said. "Mean face on him, too."

A woman's voice answered. "I didn't really look at him, but fat men—sometimes they're sweet."

"Not him," Sanders said. "And I'd love to put a fist in that big soft belly of his."

Alice stopped the reel. "Like me to play that again?" she asked.

Parker grunted. "I thought you

said there was something worth listening to."

"There is—later on." She pushed the button marked *Forward* and studied the dial. At some point that she had previously noted, she stopped the reel and again put it on *Play*. Sander's voice came on first.

"Look, Ruthy," he said, "let's try and plan this thing out, carefully. Because it's got to be fool-proof."

"I know that as well as you do," she answered.

"Okay, sweet. We thought of shooting him, but it would be pretty obvious who did it. After all, the heirs are bound to be the chief suspects."

"Then it has to be an accident."

"Right. Something simple that will look perfectly natural and leave no evidence. That part's important."

"If we could only push him off a cliff," she said.

"Can't. He's bedridden and the only way he can leave the house is in a coffin."

"What then?"

"Scare him to death," he said.

"That, or an accident. There's no other possibility, so let's sit down quietly and try to think this out."

"Get me a drink first," she said.

There followed sounds, a word here and there, the name Uncle Ike repeated several times and

not much more.

Alice switched off the machine. "They must have moved to the other end of the room," she said. "That's all there is. But when he dies, when their Uncle Ike dies . . ." She took a deep breath and her heavy, stubby fingers drummed on the desk.

Parker watched them and thought of the Sanders woman. Ruth Sanders. Her fingers would be long and slender. She probably had a couple of rings on them, too. Diamonds, or else sapphires. And she didn't snore. Not a girl like her. Besides, she had practically said that he was sweet.

"Ah!" he said dreamily.

"Who are they?" Alice asked in her harsh, flat voice. "And where do they live?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Sanders," Parker said. "They registered from Raceville, Connecticut—1838 Lamont Street. Looks like they got an uncle named Ike. Easy to find out his whole name. Think we ought to wait until they kill him, and then say we'll go to the police?"

"Fool!" Alice said. "If they make it look like an accident, how are you going to prove they killed him? Maybe you can and maybe you can't. But what you do is, you go there in a few days and show them the tape. You tell them that if they don't pay up, you'll bring the tape to their Uncle Ike. Ask for five thousand, and don't take less."

Parker nodded. "And after they pay up, I can go see their Uncle Ike. He ought to reward me for saving his life."

"Maybe," Alice said. "If you don't botch it."

"Me?"

"You better do it right. That's all."

"Leave it up to me," he said. "I done this kind of thing before, I can do it again."

"You did it for peanuts," Alice said. "If anybody said boo to you, you turned and ran away. But you better do it right this time. You hear me?"

Parker grunted. When Alice talked like this, she was a little too much for him. Fact was, when she got riled up, he stayed away from her . . . and thought mostly of how nice it would be if she died.

It was a long dismal week. A state trooper came around, examined Parker's books and found nothing wrong. Naturally not. They were the books that Parker kept for show, and he felt pretty pleased with himself. But otherwise, he was worried. In the past he had picked up a few dollars here and there, not really big money, and he had always felt safe. But this was different. This was serious, and he could land in jail for it.

Besides, a man like Sanders might get violent. Suppose he refused to pay and threatened Parker, or beat him up—then what?

Parker worried about it all week long, but when it came time to go, he felt better. The big car he had bought a couple of years ago was impressive. It commanded respect and gave him confidence. Sanders would realize he was dealing with a man who was somebody.

Parker had a six-hour drive ahead of him and on the way he figured things out. He wondered how to approach Sanders. Maybe tell Sanders he had a big real-estate deal and then, when he saw Sanders, come out with the tape business. Or else phone Sanders and say Sanders had better see him, it was something about Uncle Ike. Or maybe just walk into the house, sit down and lay the cards on the table.

"Five thousand," Parker would say in a deep commanding voice. "And while you're figuring out where to get the money, you better give me a drink. Scotch. With a little water."

And Mrs. Sanders? She might ask her husband to go easy. She might promise Parker all sorts of things. She thought he was sweet, didn't she?

Thinking about things like that, wondering how fifty one-hundred dollar bills would feel in his pocket and whether the bills were too bulky to fold, Parker drove along. The thought of money kept him fresh, six hours of driving was six hours of communing with the

prospect of cash. When he reached Raceville he was hardly even hungry.

He found Lamont Street easily. It was the best and widest street in town, with a grass mall planted with ornamental shrubs. Number 1838 was a large, Georgian structure, brick, with a three-car garage adjoining it and connected by a covered breezeway. A man who owned a house like this, he'd have a big balance in his checking account.

No big problem about his going down the street next morning and taking five thousand out of the bank. "In hundreds," Parker would say. They'd hand it to him without even wondering why he wanted so much. Then he'd bring it to Parker, and Parker would hand him the tape and they'd shake hands on the deal.

Sanders would congratulate himself on buying himself out of trouble, but he'd be wrong. Parker would stay in town, and later on he'd call this Uncle Ike and explain. And give him the second copy of the tape, the extra one that Parker had packed in his suitcase.

He was too smart to risk Sanders grabbing the tape and then defying him to do anything. No sirree. Parker didn't take chances. Two tapes with him and a third one back home.

After he'd looked over the house, Parker drove back to the center of town and made his phone

call from the hotel. Mrs. Sanders answered, he recognized her voice right off. It was a high, feminine voice and Parker had an urge to tell her who he was and make friends with her, but he restrained himself. This was business.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Sanders," he said.

"Just a moment. Who's calling?"

"He'll know when he sees me. Just tell him—somebody."

"Yes of course. But you sound so—mysterious."

"I am," Parker said and felt clever.

Sanders came on the wire in about a half a minute. "Hello?" he said.

"Never mind who this is," Parker said. "I want to see you about something important."

"Are you kidding?"

"Mister, this is a matter of life and death. Do what I say, or you'll be damn sorry."

"Is this some kind of a threat?"

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. But you better come talk to me. I'm at the hotel here and I'll be waiting in the bar. And come quick."

"The hell I will. Tell me what this is about, and I'll decide whether I want to see you."

"It's about your Uncle Ike. Remember what you said to your wife? We thought of shooting him, but it would be pretty obvious who did it. I got a tape of the

exact words. Remember? Or do you want me to go tell your Uncle Ike?"

The phone clicked and Parker stared at the mouthpiece in anger, in fury, in worry. Then, unsure of himself, he went into the bar, sat down at a corner table and ordered a double scotch with water. His hand shook when he lifted the glass.

He waited almost a half hour before he saw Sanders stride into the room. He was wearing red slacks and a checked sports shirt. Parker raised his hand and waved, and Sanders came over.

"So it's you," Sanders said scornfully. "That motel."

"I guess you remember now," Parker said. "I guess you remember making those plans for your Uncle Ike. You and the Mrs.—you're the heirs, and you said you had to be careful you wouldn't be suspected. Remember?" And Parker took out the box containing the tape.

Sanders sat down. "Well," he said, "this is kind of a surprise. Seems you had the room bugged. Right?"

"You couldn't be righter."

"What about it?"

"Five grand," Parker said. "In hundreds. Then you can have the tape."

"No kidding?" Sanders said. His tongue flicked out over his small firm mouth. "You want five thousand for the tape?"

"Cheap," Parker said.

"And if I don't pay up?"

"Then I'll go see your Uncle Ike. And the police, too."

Sanders burst out laughing. "You drove all the way here just to tell me that!" he exclaimed. "Wait till I tell Ruthy. Best joke I ever heard. My friend, I'll have to put you in a book!"

"Are you crazy?" Parker said.

Sanders, shaking his head, still rocking with laughter, could barely speak. "You don't know who I am?" he said. "My wife and I, we're a writing team. We write mysteries, and when we get stuck on a plot, we go off somewhere. Driving helps us to think, and besides, we have to get away from the kids.

"So we hole up in a motel and talk about the plot. Uncle Ike—he's the victim in the book we're writing. Title's going to be 'Death in Detail.' And you thought it was for real!" And Sanders leaned back in a new peal of laughter.

Parker blinked. "How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Ask anybody in town. Ask about Avery Ames—that's our pen name. They'll tell you about us—the husband and wife writing team. We're well known. I guess you don't read mysteries, do you?" Sanders grinned, but his blue eyes were cold and the grin was not pleasant. "Maybe you'd better read our next one. 'Death in Detail.'"

"I was just trying to do my duty as a citizen," Parker said.

"When I hear people plotting a murder, what am I supposed to do? Let them get away with it?"

"So you came here in the interests of justice," Sanders said sarcastically. "Look—what I'm thinking right now is, suppose I told the attorney general and the license commissioner about this bugging. Or the association of motel owners. Where would you be then? Better think it over, and carefully." He reached out for the tape, snorted, put it in his pocket, got up and walked out.

Parker ordered another scotch, drank it and checked into the hotel. While he was registering, he said to the clerk, "Avery Ames—the name mean anything to you?"

"Sure. That's the husband and wife team that write mysteries. They live right in here in town."

"Oh," Parker said. "How much for the room?"

"Twenty dollars."

Parker's hand stopped in the middle of setting down his address. "Haven't you got something cheaper?" he asked.

Back at the motel the following evening, he gave Alice an account of the fiasco. "I scared him though," Parker said, finishing. "You won't be hearing from him again."

"Avery Ames," Alice said thoughtfully. "I'd better go to the library tomorrow and look at their books."

She returned the next afternoon with a library copy of an Avery Ames volume. She didn't show Parker the title, she merely showed him the portrait on the back of the jacket. He saw a round-faced, dark-haired man with a smiling pixie of a wife.

"I don't get it," Parker said, frowning.

"Because you're too stupid to get it, but I asked the librarian about them. She knows everything, she's real literary."

"So?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you? That's a picture of John Avery and Dorothy Ames, who write under the name of Avery Ames. Sanders has nothing to do with them. He pretended that he and his Mrs. were that writing team, and you fell for it. You stupid idiot! Everything you do, you botch it!"

"If you think you can do any better," Parker said sullenly, "Then go ahead and try."

"Maybe I will," she said. "And the first thing I'm going to do is subscribe to the Raceville paper, so I'll know what's going on down there."

"Waste of money," Parker said. But he spoke without conviction, and at dinner that night he hardly dared complain about the Parmigiana, which was the worst he'd ever tasted.

He brooded all week. Secretly he was afraid of Sanders. Sanders

was young, strong, resourceful, and he had outwitted Parker nicely. Bugging a motel room and attempting extortion were felonies with heavy prison penalties, as Alice pointed out regularly every night. And at breakfast, too.

"You haven't the gumption to stand up against him," she said. "But I'm warning you—if you let him put anything over on you again, I'll make you regret it."

"What can happen?"

"I don't know what can happen, but I wish this motel was in my name instead of yours. I don't go bugging rooms, do I?"

Parker didn't have the will to argue. He sat around grumpily, but in proportion to his dejection, Alice's spirits seemed to lift. Once, she even hummed to herself, for the first time in thirty years.

A few days later the first copy of the *Raceville Weekly Courier* arrived in the mail. Parker, sitting in his office, read the headlines. They had to do with the local teachers' strike, but one of the inside pages contained an item of absorbing interest to the Parkers.

It stated that Isidor Sanders, of 1838 Lamont, had died of an injury sustained from falling out of bed. He had been an invalid for some months. At the time of the accident he was alone in the house except for his nephew,

Alexander Sanders, with whom he lived. Alexander had gone upstairs, but too late to be of any assistance. By the time a doctor arrived, the older Sanders was dead.

Parker, reading the item, saw dollar signs all around it. "*Something simple, that will look perfectly natural,*" That's what Sanders had said. Then his uncle falls out of bed and dies, with nobody in the house except Sanders. Well, he'd certainly pay for Parker's silence now. And Parker wouldn't fall for that line about writing a book. No sirree. Not again.

He patted his huge belly and thought about the five thousand dollars he had let slip through his fingers. Compared to that, the few dollars he took in for a motel room seemed like small change, and when a car drew up and a customer walked into the office, Parker didn't even bother standing up.

"Sign the register," he mumbled. "Twenty dollars. Any room you like." And, overcome with his generosity, he began fanning himself.

When Alice came into the office, he handed her the paper. "Read it," he said. "We got him this time."

Alice's thick, bulbous lips moved as she read. "So he killed his uncle," she said with satisfaction, after she finished. "Now he's rich. We'll take half of what

he inherits, and then we'll sell the motel and retire."

"What if he won't give us half?"

"*Make him,*" she said. "or it'll be the last thing you ever do. I'm warning you—make him."

"Nobody orders me around," he said. "Least of all, you."

Nevertheless, he shrank from the prospect of facing Sanders, and Sanders haunted him in his dreams. Two days later, when a state trooper came to the motel and asked to see the register, Parker decided that Sanders was responsible.

"I got a complaint," the trooper said. "Overcharge. Got your prices posted?"

"Sure, but people take the signs down sometimes," Parker said. "They keep 'em for souvenirs."

"I want to look at Number Nine," the trooper said. "Got the key?"

Nervously, Parker pointed to the rack behind the counter. "Help yourself," he said. "But if the notice is missing, some customer must have taken it. Not my fault, is it?"

The trooper, unimpressed, made no comment. Parker pulled himself out of his chair and was moving toward the closet where he kept the extra notices, when the yellow sports car drove up. Sanders jumped out and came into the office. The way he walked,

confidently and with the expression of a man who expected to enjoy himself, made Parker cringe.

"What do you want?" he asked nervously.

"Just a friendly talk," Sanders said. "Same thing we talked about the other day, but with a difference."

"What do you mean?"

"You gave me a tape, remember? Well, it proves you bugged the room."

"It proves you were plotting to kill your uncle. And now I know you went ahead and carried out the scheme."

"The police don't think so," Sanders said. "I had a long talk with them and gave them the details they asked for. No question but what it was an accident."

"You plotted how to kill," Parker said, "and you're his heir. You said so."

"If I was, the police wouldn't believe me completely, but all I got is that big house, which is expensive to run. Everything else went to charity, and I'm broke and I need money."

"Why come here?"

"Because I figure you wouldn't want me to tell the police about that bugging, so I thought we'd get together and go partners in the motel. You run it, just like before, only you split with me. Fifty-fifty. Alex Sanders, your silent partner."

Sanders glanced out of the doorway, added, "You got a nice location here. I figure the motel can support me, and your wife can do the cleaning. No need to pay for hired help when we got her around."

"You're crazy! You can't get away with that."

"Bugging? Extortion? My friend, you're in a bad spot and you're going to do exactly what I tell you to."

"No" In his frustration, Parker almost screamed it. "It's my motel. I won't give it up. I'll kill you first!"

"You don't mean that," Sanders said. "An old man like you—"

"You got it all wrong," Parker said. "I didn't do anything. It was Alice—she's the one. But you and I, we can figure out something. You—" At the sudden look of fear in Sander's face, Parker gasped. He tried to turn around, but he felt paralyzed and the sound of the shot deafened him as his mind went blank.

For a moment, before he saw the hole in Sander's head and watched him topple, Parker thought that he himself had been hit. Then he touched his cheek and realized he was safe. Still, neither Parker's body nor his mind was capable of anything except sluggish movement, and it took him several seconds to become aware that Alice not only had fired the shot, but had shoved

the gun into his hand and he had grasped it.

He was still in shock, still holding the gun, when the trooper rushed in and took it from him.

Parker tried to explain, but all he could do was stammer, "Alice—Alice—her!"

The trooper, taking the gun from Parker's hand and placing it carefully on the counter, spoke contemptuously. "Trying to blame your wife?" he said. He took out handcuffs and snapped them on Parker's wrist.

Parker had a tough night of it. He kept telling his story, but to no effect! He had been caught red-handed. Both his wife and one of the guests had heard him arguing with Sanders and threatening him. Sanders had been shot with Parker's gun. Parker had it in his hand when the trooper appeared. Nevertheless, the police released Parker the following morning.

"It was your wife that shot Sanders," the sergeant said. "She won't tell us why, but we got the evidence. She was cooking Parmigiana and it was all over her hands. When she pulled the trigger, that sticky stuff stuck to the metal and left a nice, clear print—in cheese. So we know she fired the shot and you told us the truth when you said she shoved it in your hand. Some wife you got!"

He was tired and hungry and in a daze when the police brought

him back to the motel. There, he found Mrs. Sanders sitting in the office.

"I heard the news over the radio," she said pleasantly, "and I've been waiting for you."

"For me?" Parker said, perking up. It occurred to him that, with Sanders dead, it would be perfectly natural for Ruth Sanders to want to hook up with him, Parker. She liked fat men, he had a nice business going, and a lot of women fall for older men. And the way she was smiling at him, he could tell she was pleased.

"You were waiting?" he said. "For me?"

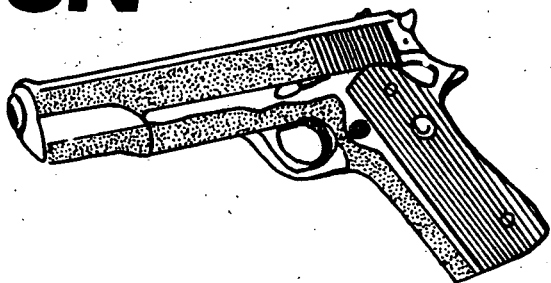
"That's right. I wanted to finish the discussion you were having with my husband. He was asking for a half-interest in the motel, wasn't he?"

"Well," Parker said, hedging, but thinking that with Alice out of the way, there was no reason for not going partners with Ruth Sanders. "Well," he said, "we were discussing business, but you wouldn't act the way he did, would you?"

"Of course not," Mrs. Sanders said. "The idea of offering to let you keep half the motel when he could make you give it all up is quite ridiculous, as you're bound to realize. Because otherwise . . ."

She paused and smiled softly. But I'm sure you're such a sweet old man, aren't you?"

THE GUN



by EDWARD D. HOCH

The Stolen Army Automatic Left a Trail of Crime in Both Hemispheres Before It Was Finally Disposed of.

THE GUN WAS a U.S. Army Colt .45-caliber automatic pistol with five-inch barrel, fixed sights, grooved trigger, grip and thumb safeties, checkered grips, blued steel finish. It weighed 2½ pounds, and sold at the time for \$94. It was manufactured one day in the early autumn of 1976, test-fired at the Colt factory, packed in cosmoline, and shipped to San Francisco as part of a cargo bound for U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

This particular gun, serial number US2360501, found its way with 23 others to a Military Police detachment newly installed on the outskirts of Saigon. The supply sergeant, a man named Krost, was quite skillful at removing excess items from his inventory and selling them on the Saigon black market or to soldiers in other units. Thus it was that he

approached a private named Barr in a night club one evening.

"How are you, Sergeant?" Barr said, sipping his drink.

"Good as could be expected. Say, you told me once you'd like to buy a .45 if I ever had any extras. Still interested?"

"Sure!" Barr was at a stage of his youth where he fancied himself as something of a gun collector. "If it's not too expensive. How much?"

"Thirty dollars."

"Thirty! Gee, I couldn't go that high."

Krost, who could have sold the weapon for twice as much to certain members of the Saigon underworld, still agreed to lower his price. When it came to guns, he liked dealing with Americans. He didn't want any deaths on his conscience—not white men's

deaths, at any rate. "Twenty-five and it's yours," he said, and Private Barr acquired a gun.

It was nearly a year later when Barr returned home to his wife and baby son. In addition to the Army .45 he brought back a .32-caliber Llama and a Walther P38, both acquired in the streets and alleys of Saigon.

But Cynthia Barr did not like guns—did not even want them in the house. "What about when Tod gets a little older?" she argued. "Do you want him finding it one day and shooting himself, or shooting a playmate?"

"But it's not even loaded," Barr argued. "None of them are loaded. I've never even fired them. They're just souvenirs, Cyn!"

"I don't care! I don't want them in the house!"

The following week, Barr took the three handguns to a local pawn shop. The squint-eyed man behind the counter bought the Llama and the Walther quickly enough, but he wouldn't touch the Colt. "You think I'm crazy, mister! *Property of the U.S. Government* stamped right on the barrel and you want me to buy it? No sir! You take that one out of here!"

A few weeks later, when Barr's brother-in-law had helped him paint the garage, Barr said, "Jimmy, I should give you something for this. Look, why don't you take this Army .45 I brought

back? Cyn wants it out of the house, and I can't sell it. Hell, you can maybe use it to shoot woodchucks or something."

Jimmy Collins accepted the weapon with undisguised interest. "It looks like new!"

"Far as I know, it's never even been fired."

"Well, thanks. I really appreciate this! I'll take it out in the country some weekend and get in a little target practice."

But Jimmy Collins never had a chance to try out his new gun. Three weeks later, while he was out drinking with some buddies from the office, a burglar ransacked his apartment. He stole ten dollars in quarters, an expensive German camera, and the Army .45 automatic.

* * *

The burglar was far from professional. He was, in fact, the 17-year-old son of the widow who lived downstairs. The boy, whose name was Teddy, had no real need for the loot of his robberies.

He was not on drugs, or in debt, or even in trouble with a girl. He broke into apartments for the sheer thrill of it, and often much of his loot was simply given to friends.

The gun, however, was something else. It intrigued him, and he stood before the mirror in his bedroom hefting it, first in one hand and then in the other. He decided to keep it, and he hid it away carefully in his closet.

Two months later, Teddy was fleeing down a fire escape after a burglary when he slipped on the wet iron rungs and fell to the ground. A policeman collared him before he could regain his footing, and Teddy was arrested, charged with several counts of burglary and robbery. His mother, in tears, posted bail.

While awaiting his appearance in court, Teddy acted quickly to dispose of the hidden gun. He sold it to an older youth, a young man who dealt in narcotics. The man traded it for a fix of heroin.

Jasse Youngblood was the next possessor of the gun, but he kept it for only two days before selling it for thirty-five dollars to a man he knew only slightly. He used the money to buy more drugs.

The man was Morty Ribon, a small-time crook who lived on the fringes of the mob. He knew there was always a market for guns, especially guns in good condition that couldn't be traced.

One night a few weeks later, he was sitting with a man named Arnold Foster in a motel room north of the city. "Arnold, they tell me you're looking for guns."

"Who tells you?"

"I hear talk. Good guns that can't be traced."

"Maybe I could use one or two."

"Could you use an Army .45?"

"I guess so."

"Eighty dollars."

"That's a bit high."

"Take it or leave it," Morty said. He had other buyers.

"Do you have it with you?"

"In the car."

"Let's take a look."

Morty went out and returned in a moment with the gun, wrapped in an old rag inside a shoe box. "You won't find any better. It's like new."

Foster tried the heft of it, then ejected the empty cartridge clip. "Got any ammo?"

"Will a box do you?"

"Sure."

"I'll throw it in. Eighty for the gun and ammo."

Foster bit his lower lip, considering. "I usually prefer revolvers. You don't have to worry about them jamming."

"Hell, Army .45s don't jam!"

"All right," Foster decided. "Eighty."

The Army .45 was only one of a number of weapons acquired by Arnold Foster during that week. He needed five, and he got six, but that was all right. It was always good to keep a spare in the car.

"A good piece," Jocko said, running his tapered fingers over the metal of the .45. "Where'd you get it?"

"I got sources," Foster replied. "Don't get too attached to it, because it goes in the river as soon as we finish the job."

"Sure, sure."

"I mean it. Keeping it is too

risky afterwards."

"When do we hit the place?"

"Tomorrow morning. Just after it opens, when the clerks are still sleepy."

Foster and Jocko entered the jewelry store through its wide front entrance, just seconds after the doors had slid open. There were few people in the shopping mall at this early hour, and that was the way Foster liked it. Harry and Richards would be covering the doors, making sure no customers followed them. Casey was waiting in the car. All planned, all like clockwork.

The first clerk screamed as Foster shattered the nearest display case with his pistol. He started grabbing diamond rings and expensive watches, not even bothering to look at the others. He knew he'd be protected while he scooped up the loot, knew that Casey in the car would signal at the first sign of police cars summoned by a silent alarm system.

"*You can't do that!*" a male clerk shouted and rushed forward. From the corner of his eye Foster saw Jocko intercept the man and bring the .45 down hard across his temple. The clerk staggered and went down hard.

Foster shattered a second display case and then a third. He worked faster than the others, which was why he'd insisted on handling the loot. Jocko and Richards and Harry were good for

strong-arm stuff, but not for scooping diamonds up from shards of broken glass.

"All right," he called finally. "We're moving out." His alarm wristwatch had signaled the lapse of four minutes, and he could risk nothing longer.

He ran across the mall without looking back, covered by the other three in a wedge-shaped football formation that brushed all resistance aside. A uniformed guard was bowled over, and after that shoppers scattered for cover. Richards fired one shot in the air to discourage a second uniformed guard.

"How much?" Casey asked as they piled into the car.

"How the hell should I know how much?" Foster barked. "A hundred grand if we're lucky and the fences pay that much. Just drive! I want to get rid of this car!"

"Banks would be easier," Casey complained.

"Banks are a federal rap," Foster answered, closing the subject.

"Jocko hit that clerk pretty hard," Richards said.

"I hope I busted his skull. We'll have less trouble on the next job if I did. There's always some guy who wants to be a hero."

They pulled into a shopping center parking lot and started the shift of cars. It was time to split now into smaller groups that

had less chance of being caught. "Remember to ditch the guns," Foster warned as they parted. "We can always get more."

Jocko watched the others pull away in two cars and then turned away from his own vehicle to enter the supermarket. He did a bit of shopping and then returned to his car. Though the drive home took him over the river, he did not toss the gun into the water as instructed. It was not every day you came across a weapon as good as this one—and almost like new. He would keep it, and maybe try firing it out in the country. It could serve him well in future jobs.

It was Casey who talked, after he and Foster were arrested in a hotel room while trying to fence the stolen jewelry. Richards and Harry were picked up without resistance, but when the detectives arrived at Jocko's apartment he grabbed up the .45 and tried to escape out the back door. An officer stationed at the rear saw the big automatic in his hand and fired two shots without asking questions. Jocko was dead when they reached him.

One of the detectives, Barney Culpain, picked up the .45 from the mud of the back yard and took it in to the precinct station as evidence. Departmental regulations stated that all seized firearms had to be turned in to ballistics downtown for test firing and storage, but somehow Detec-

tive Culpain never got around to turning in the weapon.

After all, Jocko was dead and the gun hadn't been fired during the holdup anyway. He stored it away in his locker at the station house and more or less forgot about it.

Barney was a good cop and reasonably honest, but he was to find himself a few months later embroiled in a departmental feud that threatened his career. In an attempt to force his resignation, he was brought up on various charges, one of which involved failure to turn in evidence to his superiors.

The gun was not specifically mentioned, but Barney remembered it, stored away in his locker. He knew it could strengthen the case against him if it was found there.

He picked up the gun one night and took it up to the deserted squadroom. Examining it carefully, he peered through the barrel and jacked a bullet into the chamber. He wondered how the gun had reached a man like Jocko, wondered if it had ever killed anyone during its long travels. He wondered too if he could ever put it to his head and pull the trigger.

"Barney! What's *that*?"

He looked up at the sound of his name and saw another detective, Pete Brown, just coming through the door. "Just a gun, Pete. Some evidence I had to turn in."

"You had it up to your head, Barney."

"Just fooling around. It's not loaded."

"They're never loaded until something happens."

"You sound too much like a cop sometimes, Pete."

Detective Brown walked over to the window. "Think you can beat these charges they're bringing against you?"

"I can beat them."

Brown nodded. "You'd better get that gun turned in, though. They'd just love another charge to throw at you."

Barney took the weapon with him when he left the station, but he knew he could never turn it in. There would be too many questions about where he found it, and when. It was bad enough that Brown had seen him with it.

He drove out past the dump and stopped the car. Standing at the edge of a mountain of debris, he hurled the gun as far as he could into the night. By morning the bulldozer would have buried it beneath tons of rubble. That was the last of it for Barney Culpain.

* * *

It was the 'dozer operator, a man named Pepper, who spotted the blued-steel automatic as he was beginning his first run the following morning. He wiped it

off, examined it and put it in his car. It was the best thing he had found all week.

Pepper neglected to tell his wife Ruth about the find, because he knew she'd object to having the gun in the house. She so often objected to everything he did these days. So he simply hid the weapon beneath his shirts in the dresser drawer and said nothing. And that was where Ruth found it a week later, one afternoon when she was searching his things for evidence of suspected infidelity.

"He has a loaded gun in the bureau drawer," she told her mother over the telephone. "I think he's going to kill me!"

"Then get out of that house, Ruth. Don't spend another night under the same roof with that madman!"

She took her mother's suitcase. At the last minute, as she was going out the door, she remembered the gun and went back for it. On the way to her mother's house she stopped on the bridge and dropped it over the side, into the very center of the river.

The gun hit with a splash and sank quickly to the soft muddy bottom. There, within a few days' time, it was covered with silt and lost from view forever. Its life span had been less than five years. And since the day it left the factory, it had never been fired.



SLICK MURDER

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

Major Lansing Shades Death by a Hair as He Solves the Most Difficult Case in His Career with the U.S. Army in Germany

ALTHOUGH MAJOR Clifford Lansing was neatly clad in a Class-A dress green uniform, complete with polished brass and numerous ribbons tacked to his breast (most earned while an Airborne Ranger in Vietnam), General Clayton instantly noticed the heaviness of Lansing's eyelids.

Lansing saluted smartly, heels together, his tall, slender body ram-rod stiff. Sitting behind his bulky walnut desk, Clayton returned the salute. He thought the 43-year-old major's hair appeared

more gray than brown. *We all get older*, the general thought.

"Have a seat, Major," Clayton offered.

"Thank you, sir," Lansing said as he lowered his long frame into an armchair.

"You've been a field grade officer for over a week, now," Clayton remarked. "How do you like wearing oak leaves instead of twin bars?"

"I'm still having trouble believing it, sir," Lansing replied. "I was a captain for a long time."

"Too long," Clayton agreed. "Promotions are notoriously slow in the Criminal Investigation Department. I know that even better than you, Major."

"Yes, sir," Lansing replied, aware that Gen. Clayton had been CID commander in the Federal Republic of Germany for seven years.

"Sorry about getting you out of bed at 0200 hours this morning."

"I wasn't alone, general. Our lab section and coroner put in some long hours, too."

"Murders always seem to happen at such lousy hours." Clayton sighed. "What do you have so far, Major?"

Lansing handed a file folder to the general. "That's a copy of the coroner's report. Spec. Six Woods handled the autopsy."

"Woods? Isn't Captain Carson back from his leave yet?"

"No, sir. Doc Carson had a skiing accident. He broke his leg and he'll be in the States for some time. Specialist Woods is a very competent medic, sir. He handled the Grant autopsy a few months ago."

"Very well," Clayton said.

"The victim's name was Alfred Jacob Cole, Specialist Fourth Class, assigned to Charlie Battery at Kirby Barracks. Cole was a 23 year-old black from Queens, New York. He'd completed BCT at Fort Dix, completed AIT at Fort Knox. His MOS was communications installation and repairs.

"Cole's body was discovered by the post roving patrol. The guard force reported it to the officer on staff duty, who contacted CID. Cole was found in the motor pool, near his battery's commo section.

"He was killed from behind by three deep stab wounds which punctured both kidneys and splintered the spine at the small of the back. The murder weapon was a narrow-bladed folder. Such weapons generally hold a poor edge, but the point is still sharp.

"This would explain why the killer stabbed instead of cut his victim. Although illegal for American Forces personnel to possess, these knives are not restricted by West German Law and may be purchased from pawnshops and novelty stores anywhere in the country.

"The lab boys are confident that Cole was murdered where we found him. The victim didn't have a chance to struggle, so there were no torn buttons, clothing, killer's skin under the nails. No finger or foot prints either."

Lansing produced a sheet of paper from his tunic. Unfolding it, he consulted the paper as he continued. "This is a list of the objects we discovered on Cole's person. "One *Bic* pen, a large wire-tooth-comb, a pack of Kools with five cigarettes remaining, a book of weatherproof matches from a C-ration box, twenty-five

cents, two *Marks* and forty *Pfennings* in loose change, his army dog tags, a Seiko wristwatch and a wallet.

"Examination of the wallet revealed Cole's U.S. army identification card, a meal card for Charlie Battery's mess hall, a membership card to the EM-club, a ration card for cigarette and alcohol purchases, seven color photographs of naked women in rather provocative poses and three unopened condoms."

"His wallet was certainly more exciting than mine," Clayton commented, smiling.

"Well, it was missing one important commodity, sir," Lansing said. "Money. There was no paper currency, American or German, in Cole's billfold."

"Do you think robbery was the motive?" the general inquired.

"It's possible, sure," Lansing shrugged. "But I'm not convinced that was the reason. Cole was wearing rather expensive civilian clothing, but they hardly made him look wealthy enough to mug. True, many muggers attack shabbily dressed victims, but Cole was still wearing an expensive watch. Why was it overlooked by the thief?"

"Frankly, it has been my experience that the type of individual who'd kill a man at random just for the money in his pocket is generally pretty messy about it. Such a crime is usually committed by someone supporting a drug

addiction of some kind. Junkies tend to kill in a rather frenzied manner. Whoever murdered didn't waste one stroke with that knife. The killing was fast and efficient."

"Then you suspect that the money was taken to throw us off?" Clayton suggested.

"I think that's very possible." Lansing nodded. "Wendy—that is, Spec. Five Davis—went to Ansbach to get the personnel files of everyone attached to Kirby Barracks. I plan to visit Charlie Battery this afternoon to question the BC, the first sergeant, Cole's NCOIC, roommates, anyone else who might shed some light on this investigation."

"I know you're the best homicide investigator in USAEUR," Clayton remarked. "That's why I assigned you to this case. You should know that this investigation will be as sensitive a matter as the Colonel Grant episode a few months ago." The general took a deep breath. "Major-General Monroe contacted me today."

"Monroe?" Lansing showed his surprise. "I mean, what did the general have to say, sir?"

"You don't approve of General Monroe's recent conduct, Major?"

"I just feel that an army officer should wait until he's completed his military obligation before he starts running for the U.S. se-

nate," Lansing said dryly.

"I understand." Clayton sighed. "Unofficially, I agree with you. Monroe concentrates too much on publicity for his future career, and too little on his responsibilities to the service. Nevertheless, he's still a two-star general and I'm only a one-star. He's assigned someone to work with you on this case—Captain Henry Fuller, from the Human Relations Department."

"What?" Lansing's mouth fell open. "A human relations officer on a homicide investigation?"

"That's right, Major," Clayton replied. "I'm afraid you're stuck with him."

II

SP5 WENDY Davis, an attractive young WAC, sat at her desk in Lansing's office, dividing 201 personnel files according to the batteries each person was attached to at Kirby Barracks. She was doing her best to ignore Captain Henry Fuller, which wasn't easy because he was perched on the corner of her desk by her elbow. He had asked her views concerning civil rights; the army's Equal Opportunity Program, where she lived and her telephone number.

"Do you play tennis?" he inquired. "I bet you'd cut quite a figure on a court, dressed in an

outfit with a short skirt and a plunging neckline."

"Specialist Davis is trying to work, Captain," Lansing announced as he entered. "I'd appreciate it if you'd allow her to do so."

"I'm surprised you can concentrate on *your* work, Major," Fuller remarked, "with such a pretty secretary around."

"Captain Fuller," Lansing said, "why did General Monroe send you?"

"Well, a black man has been murdered. General Monroe and the Human Relations Department just want to be sure every possible effort is exerted to find the person responsible." Fuller's smile was smug. "As much effort as you exerted to find the killer of a white colonel, for example."

Lansing stared into Fuller's dark mocking eyes. The Captain was a young man with a very pale, almost-handsome smooth face—a type of face often without character due to its lack of lines around the mouth and eyes. The CID investigator resented Fuller's attitude.

He resented the implication that he considered a man's life worth less because of his race or military rank. He glanced at Wendy, she rolled her eyes at the ceiling.

"I assure you, Captain," Lansing said, "the color of the victim won't influence my investigation."

"Well, we'll see." Fuller cocked his head. "By the way, I read your 201 before I came. I notice you were a police detective before you went to Vietnam."

"That's in my file," Lansing admitted.

"You were something of a hero in Detroit back then for solving the infamous 'Ice Pick Killer' case. The man you captured was a *Latino*, a Puerto Rican. You shot him as I recall." Fuller folded his arms on his chest and stared at Lansing, "Tell me—would you have been so quick to shoot him if he'd been an Anglo-Saxon?"

"I'd shoot anyone who attacked me with an ice pick in each hand, Captain," Lansing replied dryly.

Charlie Battery's commanding officer and first sergeant supplied little information when Lansing questioned them about SP4 Cole. A soldier is seldom a frequent visitor in the unit orderly room unless he has a habit of getting into trouble. Cole had been rarely seen by the "BC" or the "First Shirt" unless he was reporting for pay. As their conversation came to an end, a beefy, hard-faced staff sergeant entered the orderly room.

"This is Sergeant Carroll," Captain Heston, the battery commander, indicated. "He's the NCO in charge of our unit communications section."

"I'm Lansing from CID," the major explained. "This is Captain

Fuller." He indicated the Human Relations officer, who stood quietly by a window. Lansing turned to Captain Heston. "I'd like to interview the Sergeant privately."

"You can use my office, Major. I've got a meeting with the post commander anyway," Heston replied.

"Thank you." Lansing nodded as he, Fuller and Carroll filed into the BC's office. Heston's furnishings were Spartan, consisting of a large metal desk, an American and a unit flag and two straight-backed chairs. Lansing invited the sergeant to sit down, relax and smoke if he so desired.

"Now," he began, "what can you tell me about Specialist Cole?"

"He pretty much did his job," Carroll replied with a Georgian drawl. "I had to kick him in the butt once in a while, but you know how that is."

"How *what* is?" Lansing inquired.

"Well, I got two of 'em in my section, sir . . ."

"Two *what*, Sergeant?" Fuller demanded, his eyes wide with accusation.

"Two colored boys." Carroll shrugged. "They're all kinda lazy, but you ain't got much choice about who you have in your section these days."

"Do you know why anyone would want to kill him?" Lansing asked. "Was he the type of person who might be involved with any-

hing illegal? Black market, drugs, nything like that?"

"Not that I know of," Carroll dmitted. "But you never can be ure about them, can you?"

"Who exactly is *them*?" uller snapped.

"Captain, I'll ask the questions f you don't mind," Lansing de-lared dryly. "Was Cole a trouble naker of some kind, Sergeant?"

"That depends on what you call *troublemaker*, sir," Carroll eplied as he fished a pack of igarrettes from his pocket. "Cole igured hisself for a real ladies' nan. His nickname was 'Slick'." Carroll snorted. "He thought he was a real big man—waltzin' on ost when he was off duty, with hem white, German bitches . . ."

"Listen, Carroll . . . " Fuller began.

"Okay, Sergeant," Lansing nterrupted. "Cole liked women, ut don't most men?"

"Yes, sir." Carroll nodded as ie lit a cigarette. "But Cole liked o show off. He'd bring two kraut oads on post at the same time. hat's enough to get under any nan's skin."

"Many women find the Ameri-an Negro exceptionally attrac-ive, Sergeant," Fuller snapped.

"How'd you like your sister atin' a nigger, sir?" Carroll napped back.

"I'm from the Human Rela-tions Department, Sergeant. Are ou aware that you can be court nartialled for failure to uphold

the E.O.P?"

"What *is* this? Some kinda gawddamn trap?" Carroll snarled, jumping to his feet.

"Relax," Lansing urged. Turn-ing to Fuller, he added, "Both of you. I'm conducting a homicide investigation. If you can't remain objective concerning the personal opinions and prejudices of the suspects involved, I'll have to exclude you from participation."

"Suspects?" Carroll croaked, "Are you tellin' me I'm a murder suspect?"

"Everyone who was on this base last night is a murder sus-pect, Sergeant. Although some are *more* suspect than others." Lans-ing revealed a frosty smile. "Let's go inspect Cole's belongings."

Permanent party military personnel in Europe are assigned to small rooms according to the section they work for. Four wall-lockers and bunks told Lansing how many men worked under Carroll as he entered Cole's room. He was surprised to see two bunks were occupied, as most personnel work from 0500 hours until 1700 hours (5PM). One of the figures, sleeping beneath an olive-drab blanket, sounded like a pig in heat as he snored. Moving to one of the wall-lockers, Carroll turned to Lansing.

"Do you have the key, sir?" he asked.

"No. We didn't find a key on Cole's body."

"Guess we'll have to bust it,"

Carroll commented as he walked to a small army-issue desk and pulled a drawer open.

Extracting a tack-hammer, he returned to Cole's locker and swung the tool four times. The lock jumped and bobbed as metal struck metal loudly. At last, the padlock snapped apart and fell to the floor.

"What the hell?" muttered one of the men who had been sleeping. The other continued to snore as if he were in an echo chamber.

Lansing pulled the wall-locker door open and appraised it with raised eyebrows. "Cole kept a clean locker."

"Yeah, I guess so, sir," Carroll admitted.

Uniforms and civilian clothing were hung according to USAEUR regulations. Headgear was also lined up along the top shelf in a proper manner. Opening the drawers of the locker, Lansing discovered shaving equipment and military brass were all arranged as if ready for inspection. Socks and underwear were neatly rolled in the bottom drawer. A small stack of magazines in the upper right hand corner. Lansing extracted the publications and leafed through them.

"Business magazines, a booklet dealing with advertising techniques, copies of *The Wall Street Journal*," Lansing commented, noticing that several blue-chip stock listings had been underlined.

The Major inspected Cole's clothing, discovering a number of unopened condoms in a field jacket pocket.

"Like I said, a real ladies' man," Carroll said.

The man who had awakened due to the banging, seeing two officers in the room, had risen and stood at attention by his bunk. He was a young slender black with a pencil-thin moustache. Lansing told him, "At ease."

Turning to Carroll, Lansing said, "Thank you, Sergeant. Now, I'd like to talk to your men privately."

"Yes, sir." Carroll nodded. He glanced at Fuller suspiciously before leaving.

"Hey, man! What's happening?" Fuller said to the black soldier.

Lansing introduced himself and Fuller. "Mind if we disturb your sleep a little while longer to discuss Specialist Cole?"

"Okay, sir," the trooper replied.

"What's your name, soldier?"

"Simms, Private First Class."

"You can call me, Hank," Fuller urged as he moved forward, offering an upturned palm. "Give me five, Jack."

"Hello, sir," Simms said awkwardly, shaking Fuller's hand in the universal manner.

Fuller's face fell. Lansing scratched his nose to hide a smile. Whenever an officer tried

to be one of the boys with an enlisted man, he made a fool of himself. Fuller, Lansing decided, still had a lot to learn about the responsibilities and code of conduct connected with the twin bars he wore.

"Okay, Simms," Lansing began, addressing the soldier by his last name instead of his rank, because he realized to call a man "PFC" only reminds him that he hasn't made SP4 yet. "What can you tell us about Cole?"

"Well, sir," —Simms sighed deeply—"Slick and I weren't buddies. He did his job most of the time, but nobody in the section really liked the guy. He was a snotty dude, you know? Off duty, he ran around with a group of smart-ass types.

"Who belongs to this group?" Lansing asked.

"You're not asking him to be an Uncle Tom are you, Major?" Fuller demanded.

Before Lansing could answer, Simms said, "I don't see how helpin' you find Slick's killer makes me a Tom." Simms shrugged. "The only other member of the bunch I know is Cleon Johnson. He's a mechanic assigned to Charlie Battery. All the other members of the group are from other units."

"What kind of group is it?"

"I don't really know for sure. I think they just hang around together. They spend a lot of time

in the service club. All I know for sure is they're all black dudes and they resent white folks with a passion."

"This Johnson character was Cole's friend?"

"Well, they weren't really getting along too well lately. The two of them used to be the best-of-buddies. Johnson was like Slick, he'd bring a couple of big-busted, blue-eyed blondes on post, too. It was as if they *wanted* to upset every racist on Kirby."

"So, Cole was a womanizer?"

"Sure was," Simms confirmed. "He never went anywhere without his little black book."

"We didn't find an address book on Cole's corpse," Lansing spoke thoughtfully.

"It's not in his wall locker?" Simms asked.

Lansing shook his head. "Why weren't Johnson and Cole getting along?"

"I don't really know" Simms admitted. "They just stopped hanging around each other. They'd seem to glare at each other at formations. I heard Slick say he was 'gonna teach that high yellah a lesson.' Johnson is a real light-skinned dude. Like I said, Slick was a snotty guy. He seemed to have a habit of lousing up friendships."

"What other friendships did he lose?"

"Well, there's a guy named Mendoza who works in Bravo

Battery's Commo Section. He and Slick used to be closer than warts on a toad until they had a big fight one day, and I do mean *fight*."

"What caused it?"

"Beats me, sir." Simms shrugged. "I saw the fight. It was about a month ago. We—C-Battery's Commo Section—were preparing radio equipment for an upcoming field maneuver. Sergeant Carroll noticed we'd run out of copper wire, so he sent Slick and me to Bravo's Commo Section to get some."

"Mendoza was there. He greeted Slick like a long-lost brother, you know. They were doing the 'dap' handshakes and calling each other 'my man,' all that stuff. Well a buck sergeant showed me where the wire was while Mendoza and Slick were still shootin' the breeze."

"Next thing I know, Mendoza is screaming at Slick, calling him a *dirty nigger*. Slick shouts back at Mendoza, calling him a *spic sonofabitch*. Then the punches start to fly. Whatever else he might have been, Slick was no pushover. He was a bad dude with his fists. He knocked the hell out of Mendoza. The fight was never reported, everybody agreed to keep it hushed up, but Mendoza and Slick never did patch up their friendship."

"Did Cole ever deal in drugs or black market?"

"Not that I know." Simms

stroked his moustache thoughtfully. "Maybe he sold some cigarettes and booze to the Germans, but a helluva lot of guys do that."

"If he did, he wasn't using his ration card. It was only marked for a few purchases," Lansing remarked.

"What about Sergeant Carroll?" Fuller inquired.

Simms chuckled. "I bet the Sarge is madder than a male dog without any fireplugs in sight today. Callahan was on roving patrol and I was on duty as Charge of Quarters assistant last night, so we've both got the day off. Harker, another guy in Commo is on leave in France and now, old Slick got himself killed. That means Carroll will have to do all the work by himself today."

"I mean—how did Carroll get along with Cole?"

Knitting his brows, Simms directed his question at Lansing.

"Is this off the record, sir?"

"You have my word, Simms," the CID investigator assured him.

"Sergeant Carroll doesn't like black people. Slick didn't like white people. Callahan"—he pointed to the snoring figure still horizontal on the bunk—"Harker and I all get along fine with each other, but we never cared much for either of those hardheads. The sarge and Slick had a lot of arguments. Words like *nigger* and *honkey* popped up more than once."

"Why didn't Cole go to his E.O.P. department?" Fuller asked.

"Probably because he had bad-mouthed Carroll as bad as the sergeant bad-mouthed him. Besides, an NCO is still an NCO."

"What were these arguments about?" Lansing asked.

"Just about anything." Simms rolled his eyes, "I do know that Carroll got real upset about black dudes dating white chicks. Hell, the local women are mostly white. There's one black WAC on this base and about two hundred soul brothers. What are we suppose to do? Stand in line to go out with her or go without women for three years?"

Lansing smiled, "That would be conduct above and beyond the call of duty."

"You get our problem, sir." Simms nodded. "But Slick really got Carroll upset because of his two-for-one act. Slick used to brag about his sexual victories just to get Carroll mad."

"Do you think Carroll would seriously consider killing Cole?"

"Yes, sir," Simms said grimly. "I do."

III.

SP4 RAMON Mendoza emerged from the quartermaster laundry, happily inspecting a class-A uniform encased in a plastic wrapper. He nearly dropped it as he fumbled to move the uniform to his

left hand and salute as Major Lansing and Captain Fuller approached.

"Specialist Mendoza?" Lansing required, returning the gesture.

"Yes, sir," the Mexican-American soldier spoke slowly. His expression darkened with concern.

"Your NCOIC told us we'd find you here," Lansing commented. "Those dress greens will look very well at the wedding. When do you tie the knot?"

"Next week—the 23rd," Mendoza explained.

"Good luck," Lansing told him. "You're marrying a local girl, a German National, correct?"

Mendoza nodded uncertainly. "Is something wrong, sir?"

"Nothing that affects your wedding plans," Lansing assured him. The CID officer introduced himself. He didn't bother to tell Mendoza who Fuller was and the Captain was silently sulking because he felt he was being ignored.

"You think I had something to do with Slick's murder?" Mendoza asked, eyes wide and brows peaked high on his forehead.

"You knew Cole," Lansing remarked. "I understand you were close friends until recently."

"That's right, sir," Mendoza admitted, bitterness favored the tone of his voice.

"What's the fight about, Specialist?"

"It was a personal beef. No

big deal."

"It was big enough for you to exchange some heated words and a few punches."

"Slick got me mad. He had a nasty mouth. The guy rubbed a lot of people the wrong way."

"Then why were you ever friends to begin with?" Lansing inquired.

"You really want to know?" Mendoza asked tensely. "I got worked over by some rednecks while I was in Basic at Fort Jackson. I was still carrying around a lot of hate for *Anglos* when I met Slick." Mendoza sighed. "But I got over it."

"Did you?"

"I'm marrying a *white* girl, sir."

"How about your hate for Slick? He beat you up, didn't he?"

"It was a fair fight, sir."

"But you said he started it."

"I see." Mendoza's face stiffened. "You think because I couldn't take him with my hands, I waited until I could cut him up like the sneaky little greaser I am. Is that it?"

"No one is suggesting such a thing," Fuller insisted.

"Yeah," Mendoza growled. "The noon break is almost over. I have to put this uniform away in time to make formation."

"We'll contact you later if we need you," Lansing told him before allowing the trooper to hurry across the litter-free lawn.

"Well, Major," Fuller began as he shook his head slowly, "you really blew it that time."

Lansing's white volkswagen returned to Kirby Barracks shortly after 2030 hours. He parked the diminutive car in front of a building that housed the service club. He was alone. Although Lansing considered the army's equal opportunity program important, he also considered Captain Fuller excess baggage which interfered with his investigation.

He hadn't told Fuller he planned to return to Kirby Barracks after dark. His actions would ruffle Fuller's ego feathers—and possibly General Monroe's as well—but Lansing would deal with that later. Now, he had a job to do and a murderer to catch.

"Many U.S. army bases in Germany use buildings originally constructed by the Nazis before World War II. The headquarters building of Kirby Barracks had once been a *Hoch Kommandantur* and the structure that currently contained a snack bar, PX and service club had once been the personal quarters of a German general. Lansing wondered how the place had been thirty-six years ago as he mounted the stairwell to the service club.

Posters advertising the *Oktoberfest* and the bus trips to Munich had replaced the flags with swastikas that had once decorated the walls. Off-duty GIs and civilian employees had replaced

the general's staff and storm-trooper guard force. Germany had undergone a bizarre transformation since Hitler's heyday. Even a former concentration camp had become a tourist attraction.

Lansing dismissed such thoughts as he reached the head of the stairs and walked to the service club. Designed to allow enlisted men to relax while off duty, service clubs generally appeared much alike. Card tables, free coffee, an assortment of magazines, puzzles and television were offered to servicemen who desired such quaint pastimes. A plump middleaged woman was the service club's "Den Mother." Lansing accosted her, asking where Cleon Johnson might be.

"Oh!" She raised her plucked eyebrows, "You mean 'Ace' Johnson."

"Probably," Lansing replied.

"He and his friends are in the music room. The men sign for the room for an hour or so to play musical instruments or listen to records without disturbing anyone in the lobby. The room is right down the hall and to the left."

Lansing thanked her and walked down the corridor to the music room. He knocked on the door once, then opened it. A blast of extremely loud soul music assaulted his ears. Four young blacks, two in civilian clothing and two wearing fatigue uniforms, stared at him with surprise. Each man had a lighted cigarette in his

hand, one held a metal flask.

A sign on the wall declared that smoking and beverages were not allowed in the music room. One man jumped to attention, as required by military custom when a field-grade officer enters a room. He noticed his peers remained seated, so he reluctantly returned to his own chair.

"Whatcha want, *sir*?" a narrow-faced light-skinned black inquired. His question sounded like a demand and his pronunciation of *sir* dripped insolence.

"C.I.D.," Lansing announced loudly

"Oh, *crap*!" A fellow with his fatigue cap turned backwards on his bushy Afro, muttered.

"What is this—a bust?" The first man to speak chuckled as he removed the needle from the record, silencing it.

"You're Specialist Johnson?" Lansing asked.

"I'm PFC Johnson. Got busted last week."

"I'd like to ask you some questions about Spec. 4 Cole. Privately, if you don't mind."

"What's the matter? Don'tcha want no witnesses, Major?" a big, beefy, very dark man snorted. He dropped his cigarette and ground it into the floor with his boot.

"Don't push, Lee," Johnson told him. "You guys wait for me in the rec room. I can handle this scene okay."

Muttering sourly, the other

three men rose and filed past Lansing, glaring at the white major's impassive face. The last man closed the door as he left. Johnson, clad in hound's tooth bell bottoms and a red silk shirt, puffed his cigarette slowly.

"Pity," Lansing commented. "With your leadership ability you should be a sergeant."

"Tell that to the racist pig I have for a battery commander," Johnson sneered.

"Maybe I will." Lansing smiled thinly. "I understand you and Cole used to be pretty close."

"Shared each others wine, women and woes," Johnson stated, blowing two perfect smoke rings at the ceiling.

"What sort of woes?"

"The type white men dump on black men."

"I see." Lansing nodded slowly as he shoved his hands into his pockets. "Tell me, Ace," His pronunciation of the nickname contained no more respect than Johnson revealed while saying *sir*. "The military pays everyone the same amount according to rank."

"The E.O.P., requires every man, regardless of race, creed or nation origin, be treated equally, and provides for violators to be prosecuted. The Human Relations Department as well as the adjutant general's office will assist any individual soldier who has a legitimate grievance concerning discrimination. What more do you

feel the army should do?"

"How about compensation for two hundred years of slavery?" Johnson hissed through clenched teeth.

"For a slave, you dress very well," Lansing remarked, "Cole was a snappy dresser too. Best-dressed corpse I've seen in years. Why'd you two bust up your friendship?"

"Hell!" Ace snorted. "Slick was still my main man! We had an argument a while back, but that was all water over the god-damn dam."

"Tell me about this water."

"The group has a car, okay? We take turns using it. Everybody pitched in to buy it. Anyway, Slick got in a fender bender with a kraut road hog. At least, we thought it was a fender bender until we found out the battery was cracked."

"So we had to get a new one. Slick was at the wheel when it got messed up, so I thought he should have to pay for it. He said it was the group's car, so we should all chip in for a new battery. Seems pretty silly now that he's dead."

"Was this mishap reported to the privately owned vehicle department of the motor registry?"

"Yeah. The P.O.V. was registered in my name. Slick made the accident report around the middle of last month."

"I'll check on that."

"You do that, Major." Ace raised his hands in a mock display

of helplessness. "I couldn't stop you anyway."

"Nobody stops me," Lansing declared as he turned to leave, "when I'm tracking down a killer."

Descending the stairs, Lansing entered the snack bar. He brought a sandwich and a cup of coffee. After consuming his scant, late supper, he left the building and walked to his car. As he reached for the Volkswagen door, two strong arms were wrapped around his chest from behind. He pulled away from the car to receive a powerful punch to the midsection, quickly followed by a solid left hook to the side of his jaw.

"You lay off Ace, honkey!" a voice snarled.

Although dazed by the unexpected attack, Lansing still recognized the massive form of the assailant who had struck him. It was Lee, the big belligerent member of Johnson's group. The beefy man swung another punch for Lansing's abdomen as the major raised his left knee.

Lee howled with pain as his fist hit the hard bone of Lansing's kneecap. The black retracted his hand, trying to figure out how he had broken a knuckle by punching the CID investigator in the gut. Lansing lowered his left leg and shot out his right in a high, powerful karate sidekick. Lee's head jerked violently as the foot smashed into his face. He crumpled to the ground with a groan.

The second opponent still held Lansing. He yelped as the major stomped on an instep. The grip loosened enough for Lansing to ram an elbow into the man's solar plexus. Winded, the assailant released Lansing.

Lansing seized one of his opponent's arms. He crammed a shoulder into the man's armpit, using it for a fulcrum as he lifted with his back and legs. Bending fast, he sent the second man hurling over his shoulder to the pavement.

As both aggressors lay stunned, Lansing produced his car keys and quickly moved to the front of the Volkswagen. He opened the trunk and extracted a tire iron.

Holding the tool as a club, he said, "This fight can end now or it can end after I've cracked open your heads." He tapped a palm with the iron. "It's your choice."

"Hey!" Cleon Johnson exclaimed as he and the fourth member of the group emerged from the building and raced to the parking lot. "What the hell's going on?"

Lansing explained what had happened. Turning to the two would-be ambushers, Ace demanded, "Is he tellin' the truth?"

They nodded silently, nursing their battered bodies while they stared at the ground to avoid Johnson's angry gaze.

"What's your part in this, Johnson?" Lansing inquired.

"For crissake, I didn't tell these

stupid bastards to jump you!" Johnson exclaimed.

"But Ace, you said . . ." Lee muttered through pulverized lips.

"What did I say, *huh?*" Johnson snapped. "I said the man was trying to hang a murder rap on me. I didn't say nothin' about jumping nobody!" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate the fourth member of his hand. "Oscar here, heard me. He knew better than to pull a dumb-ass stunt like this. Did I say anything about pouncing the major?"

"Oscar shook his head.

"But . . ." Lee began.

"Shut up!" Johnson snarled. "You're gonna get me in trouble for what you done. Slick was my buddy, man! The Major here is trying to catch the sonofabitch that stuck a shiv in Slick. I want him to get the guy. I just don't want him on my ass!"

"Did he order you to work me over?" Lansing asked the vanquished pair.

"No, sir." Lee admitted.

"Since you two came out of this little encounter worse than I did . . ." Lansing worked his jaw painfully. "At least, I think so. I won't press any charges."

"Thanks, Major." Johnson sighed. "I'll make sure these guys don't get any more turkey notions again."

"That's nice," Lansing commented. "By the way, I'm going to be carrying a gun from now on.

And you'd better believe I'll use it if I have to."

IV

CAPTAIN HENRY Fuller thrust his fists into his narrow hips as he stood in front of Lansing's desk, glaring at the Major. Lansing had just explained how he had gotten a swollen lump on his jaw.

"Well, what did you say to aggravate them?"

Lansing rose from his chair and leaned across his desk, his eyes aglow with anger. "Listen to me, Captain. I'm a homicide investigator, not a social worker."

"Do you know what I did this morning, Major?" Fuller interrupted, "I read Staff Sergeant Phillip Carroll's 201 file. He joined the army to avoid going to jail. In 1965 he enlisted to dodge an assault charge in Atlanta. In 1971 he was busted by a field-grade Article Fifteen for another assault charge, striking an enlisted man."

Fuller folded his arms on his chest smugly. "How much do you want to bet that in both cases, Carroll's assaults were directed against a black man?"

"Well, as the file doesn't supply that information, I'm afraid we can't confirm your theory."

"You're determined to blame this murder on Mendoza or Johnson, aren't you?" Fuller accused.

"You know damn well that isn't true!" Lansing rasped.

"Do I? Minority groups make beautiful scapegoats. If you can't find the killer, just railroad some poor 'nigger' or 'spic' into the stockade."

"I've had enough of that crap from you, Fuller," Lansing snapped.

"Not yet, you haven't!" Fuller declared. "I promise you, after I've sent my report to General Monroe, a new investigator will be assigned to this case. Your previous activities will then be examined with a fine tooth comb and . . ."

"You report anything you want, Fuller," Lansing growled. "Just let me do my job."

"And what have you done today?"

"I was at the motor registry to see if the automobile accident Johnson told me about was recorded as he said."

"Was it?"

Lansing nodded.

"Well, what do you say to that, Major?" Fuller asked.

"I say it's strange that two close friends would be so furious due to a cracked car battery that cost twenty dollars to replace." Lansing moved from behind his desk as he spoke.

"Are you certain you aren't allowing that attack by Johnson's friends to influence your judgment?"

"I'm certain," Lansing assured him. "Let's not forget that Mendoza was unwilling to explain why he and Cole had an argument that turned into a fist fight. He's still a top suspect."

"Haven't you ever heard of *machismo*?" Fuller remarked. "Mendoza's pride was injured when he lost that fight. That incident probably caused him to feel his maleness had been compromised. The memory is, no doubt, very painful and he doesn't wish to discuss it."

"Yeah," Lansing nodded. "I know about *machismo*. I also know that particular Latin American code of honor has been the motive for more than one murder."

Fuller stiffened. He was about to speak as the door opened. SP5 Wendy Davis entered, a cardboard box full of file folders in her arms. Lansing quickly relieved her of the burden. Fuller frowned as the Major began to unload the box.

"That's fourteen month's worth," Wendy explained, happy to be rid of the container.

"What's this? More 201 files?" Fuller asked with a bored expression causing his features to sag.

"Hardly," Lansing replied. "Wendy just returned from Kirby Barracks. I sent her to get some information from the security police stationed at the entrance gate. As all three prime suspects

would recognize me—(and I don't want to frighten the killer into bolting)—I entrusted this assignment to Wendy." He smiled. "Besides the SPs are all male and Specialist Davis can be quite persuasive while getting responses from healthy young men."

"What information could the SP's have about Cole's murder?" Fuller asked, totally bewildered.

"All civilian personnel entering a military installation are required to submit identification to the security cops. Dependents of servicemen and civilian employees are issued ID cards by the army or the post commander. However, if a soldier wishes to bring a German National on post he is required to sign a visitors' form committing himself as the German's escort, and thus responsible for that person's actions while inside the installation.

"The German National is also required to surrender his or her passport to the SP's, who record the passport's registration number on the same form. As Germany is closely surrounded by other European countries, nearly every citizen over sixteen has a passport."

Fuller nodded. "That means there's a record of every German Cole and the suspects brought into Kirby Barracks."

"Fourteen months' worth," Wendy repeated. Turning to Lansing, she added, "By the way,

sir, I showed the photographs to the SP's as you requested."

"Did anybody look familiar to them?" the Major inquired.

"Sure did," she confirmed as she opened her purse and extracted a sheet of paper, "A couple of guys even remembered who they saw with them."

"Good work, Wendy," Lansing commented, scanning the paper.

"I don't understand" Fuller admitted.

"I'll explain later," Lansing promised. "Right now, I want you and Wendy to go through these forms and list every German National's passport number that was escorted on post by Cole and the three suspects. Naturally, write down who brought each German to Kirby."

"Well, then what?" Fuller asked.

"Then we get in touch with *Polizei*. We don't have any authority to ask the local passport bureau for anything, but if the German police back us we'll probably get what we want."

"And what the hell do we want?" Fuller demanded.

"The names and addresses of the individuals possessing the passports with the registration numbers recorded on those forms." Lansing smiled, knowing Fuller was growing impatient.

"Then what do we do? Interview every German these four men knew?"

"No. Then we go to the *Abgabe*

Sammlung Agentur."

"What the hell is that?" Fuller raised his hands helplessly.

"The German equivalent of our IRS." Lansing grinned. "You don't think the locals get away without paying taxes, do you?"

"Sir, this just doesn't make any sense . . ." Fuller sighed, more confused than ever.

"If my hunch is correct, it will," Lansing assured him, "You two start working on those forms. I don't want you chasing Wendy around the desk while I'm in the arms room signing for a forty-five."

"What do you need a gun for?"

"I promised some people I'd carry one."

V

SSG. CARROLL entered the conference room in the headquarters building of Kirby Barracks. He was surprised to see SP4 Mendoza and PFC Johnson sitting at one end of a long, polished table. Lansing sat at the head of the opposite end of the conference table, Captain Fuller was seated to his right.

"We've been waiting for you, Sergeant," Lansing stated. "Please sit at the end of the table with the other two suspects."

Carroll lowered himself into a chair between Mendoza and Johnson. All three men appeared

confused and nervous. Mendoza absent-mindedly cracked his knuckles as Johnson fumbled in his pocket for a pack of cigarettes. Lansing rose, carefully placed an attache case on the table and popped it open.

"Now, gentlemen," he began as he removed a number of forms and photostatic copies of documents from the case, "I've had you all sent here because one of you is a murderer."

Lansing extracted a Government Issue .45 caliber 1911 from the brief case. Everyone, including Fuller, stared as Lansing calmly worked the pistol's slide, chambering a round. He clicked on the safety catch and carefully set the .45 on the table near his right hand.

"We now have documentation of the various German civilians you three and late Specialist Cole escorted onto Kirby Barracks over the past year. Some of you brought in more people than others. Generally, your guests were lady-friends or, at any rate, women."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mendoza snapped.

"I think you know, Specialist," Lansing replied. "Captain Fuller and I sorted through the visitor forms recorded by the SP's at the entrance gate. We then went to the passport bureau to have the registration numbers of certain passports traced to their owners. We know who you brought on

post, where they live and how often you escorted each individual onto Kirby Barracks. Of course, we also have the same information about Cole's guests."

The three suspects squirmed in their chairs, glaring nervously at each other and Lansing.

Lansing continued: "The Uniform Code of Military Justice forbids any soldier from employing the services of or to connect himself in any manner with prostitution. Nevertheless, the West German government legalized prostitution shortly after World War Two. The UCMJ regulations still pertain to all American forces personnel regardless of the host country's customs or laws."

"What the hell does that have to do with Slick's murder?" Carroll asked roughly.

"Yeah," Johnson snorted. "You gonna slap somebody's wrist for going to a cathouse?"

"You gentlemen may be aware that German prostitutes are provided with police protection in their established places of business," Lansing said, ignoring the questions. "Most work regular eight-hour shifts, some have even formed unions. They are required by law to submit to monthly medical examinations for obvious reasons. Also, as a legitimate source of income, these ladies of the evening are required to pay taxes for the money they earn in this manner."

All three suspects silently

stared at the major.

"Sergeant Carroll has only brought two ladies on the post. Considering the fact he has a wife in the States, that's more than enough. One woman works as a waitress for certain tavern in Zirndorf, the other is employed at *die Want*, a well-known whorehouse in Nuremberg."

"What? I never knew I was dating a lousy hooker!" Carroll exclaimed.

"Maybe not." Lansing shrugged. "Specialist Mendoza has escorted only one female German through the entrance of Kirby Barracks—namely, his fiancée, Greta Eckart."

Mendoza slammed his fist against the conference table hard.

"Relax, Specialist," Lansing urged. "*Fraulein* Eckert works for a small bakery shop in Furth," he explained. "PFC Johnson has brought a number of women on post. Their primary occupations vary, but all have one thing in common recorded on their tax forms as 'additional income' is 'prostitution'."

Johnson stiffened.

"You said it yourself, Johnson. You and Cole shared 'wine, women and woes.' According to the SP records, Cole escorted the same women on post. The security personnel recognized these women, although no one confessed to having seen them in the disrobed condition they display on the photographs we

found in Cole's wallet. Seven part-time prostitutes."

"Wait a damn minute!" Johnson shouted, jumping to his feet.

"Sit down!" Lansing ordered flatly, his hand resting on the frame of the big blue-black pistol. Johnson obliged. "I first suspected the truth when we opened Slick's wall locker. Cole was supposed to be 'sex-crazy.' He 'dated' two women at the same time, carried photos of them, naked, in his wallet and always kept a large supply of condoms available.

"However, there were no pin-ups or centerfolds on his locker door. He didn't own any porno or sexual souvenirs. His reading material consisted of advertising techniques, business, stocks and bonds. Cole was a businessman and a shrewd one. He carried the pictures to advertise his 'goods' to potential customers. He supplied free prophylactics as a selling feature."

Mendoza and Carroll stared at Johnson. The black man's eyes were still locked on the CID investigator.

"Cole was running a traveling brothel," Lansing explained. "So were you, Johnson. Clever idea—Have Harlot, Will Travel. Escort the girls on post according to regulation, find some secluded, half-clean room to conduct business and cut the profit with the

whores. Finding customers for such a venture on my army base would be the easiest part of all."

"Even if you're telling the truth," Johnson stated. "That doesn't prove I killed Slick."

"Doesn't it? Cole's little black book and the key to his wall-locker were taken from his corpse. If Carroll killed Cole: Why would he want that book? Did he plan to hunt down all the German women who offended his sense of proper conduct? Hardly! Mendoza would only have a reason to take the book of his girl friend was a trollop."

Mendoza's face tightened. Lansing shook his head, "But *Fraulein* Eckert was never escorted on post by either Cole or Johnson. She isn't paying taxes for additional income. Also, if Mendoza came to blows with Cole because he learned his girl was part of a floating cathouse, he wouldn't still want to marry her.

"I suspect the reason Cole and Mendoza traded punches was because Cole suggested Mendoza urge his girl to participate in activities. That's what I meant when I said I think Mendoza knows what I'm talking about," Lansing continued. "The book was a list of part-time whores and probably their most frequent johns.

"Only you, Johnson would know what was in that book, and only you would have a reason to take

it. The book was evidence that could connect you with the prostitutes. You took the key either to check the wall locker for any link between yourself, Cole and the brothel trade, or because the book was still there. Being assigned to Charlie Battery, you'd know the Commo Section's barracks room would be empty."

"You're trying to frame me because of what my boys did last night!" Johnson accused.

"Your boys?" Lansing lifted an eyebrow. "I'm sure that's what you consider them as, too. Actually, sending them to work me over was a clever move. I said you revealed true leadership ability. Part of manipulating people is the ability to implant a suggestion discreetly, making your listener think the idea was his own."

"If they accepted your implication that I should be *convinced* to stop harassing you, fine. If they failed to rise to the suggestion, the attempt cost you nothing. Your friends are devoted honkey-haters, it wouldn't be difficult to influence. Racists of all colors and nationalities are universally stupid." Turning to Carroll, he added, "That goes for your attitude too, Sergeant."

The staff sergeant's face turned scarlet with rage. Lansing ignored him as he returned his attention to Johnson. "After your pals jumped me, you arrived on the

scene and went into your act. You cursed them out for interfering with my investigation because you wanted Slick's killer brought to justice. A cute trick, but not good enough.

"One mistake you made was saying Cole had a shiv *stuck* in him, indicating he had been stabbed. Mendoza, for example, used the term *cut*. A minor slip, nothing by itself, but an additional coffin nail to the lid that will bury you, Johnson."

"You haven't really given any motive," Fuller observed, breaking a long and unaccustomed period of silence.

"Cole and Johnson started out as partners, but they were rapidly becoming competitors. According to the SP records, Cole was bringing the women on post more frequently. Because of his business knowledge, he was peddling them far better. They'd rather work for him, too, simply because he drummed up more business and helped to earn more money. Johnson was being pushed out of the pimping trade."

"You can't prove nothing!" Johnson growled.

"The hookers will be brought to trial. They know that you and Cole had become rivals. They'll talk, Johnson. Your pimping days are over. That means their gravy train to Kirby Barracks is finished. According to German law they haven't done anything illegal, so they have no reason to pro-

tect you. Do you think they'll risk becoming accomplices for first degree murder?" Lansing shook his head. "Face it, Johnson. You've had it."

"That bastard Slick!" Johnson said, staring at the table top. "It was all my idea. *Mine!* I let him in on it and he turned against me. He said I didn't deserve to run the business. He told me I wasted all my money anyhow. Him and his goddamn stock investments. Said I didn't know nothing about business." An evil smile pulled at his lips. "Well, I showed *him*. I gave that sonofabitch the *business!*"

"Yeah," Lansing remarked, "Now, it's your turn."

"Should I call the MP's?" Fuller asked.

"Please," Lansing replied as he raised the .45 to point toward Johnson. "Tell them we have a prisoner." He cocked his head thoughtfully. "I told you once, Captain, that the skin color of the victim wouldn't influence my investigation. The same is true about the color of the guilty party. If, after you report to General Monroe, he isn't happy about how this case turned out, you can tell him, 'That's tough'. I have the killer. That's all I give a damn about."

"You needn't worry about that report, Major," Fuller assured him with a smile.

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DYING IN DUBLIN

by JEAN DARLING

elly Was Only a Patrolman—but When the Dublin Police proved Unable to Find the Murderer of His Wife's Aunt Mae, Kelly Went after the Phantom Attacker Himself.

ELLY'S FOOTSTEPS echoed along the deserted street past houses bibbed with green, houses tight wrapped in curtained sleep. The air was heavy with unshed rain as the wind whipped the short pipe around his thighs. By habit he crossed the street in the usual pace and paused by a wrought-iron gate, his night-stick lightly tapping the bars.

Through the garden flat door, a room at the back, his wife lay wide eyed in the dark. Her wakefulness rushed across the retch of the yard to hurl itself

Seamus Kelly's conscience. Only twelve months before, he had stood by the wrought-iron gate in the very same way, but everything had been so different then.

It had been coming on for Christmas, the same as now, and the house had been aglow with the promise of his first born moving towards birth.

The whirr of bicycle wheels turned Kelly streetwards but the "good will towards men"

showed in the face that recognized the overgrown youth wobbling the machine slowly from view. It was the Egan boy. Sighing, Patrolman Kelly moved on.

In 1967, when Seamus Kelly first had been posted to the Irish-town Garda Station, he had been fresh-faced and single, with the sound of County Clare still thick on his tongue. Less than a week later, the young Guard had fallen in love, but it took almost eight months of pounding a beat for him to gather courage enough to speak to Maura Byrne.

It was one of those rare, blue-skied summer days that occasionally do occur in Ireland, and the girl was struggling a mower around the lawn in front of her aunt's house on Tritonville Road.

"Sure, if you'll wait 'til Sunday, girl, I can be doin' for you."

The words, barely audible, were loud enough for Maura to hear above the wheeze of the mower and the thud of her heart, for she'd had her eye set on this tall, young Guard since the first

time he had passed the house. In the village these two had passed.

After that first Sunday they began walking out together, holding hands in the old Metropole Theatre, sometimes staying on to a dance. Tired of having to depend on taxis after the buses were buttoned up for the night; Kelly invested in a motorcycle.

When they weren't gadding about the countryside, the two would sit, heads together, over endless cups of Aunt Mae's tea, or eating Aunt Mae's cake, or listening to Aunt Mae's tales of what a terror her orphaned niece had been as a small child.

"And look at the girl now," she'd say. "Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, sure it wouldn't." After tea Aunt Mae would go back to her easel. "Some day I'll have to do a portrait of you," she told Shay. "Some day I'll paint you in full uniform, cape and all."

They had been doing a line for a year when Maura caught his face in her two hands and pulled it down, mouth against hers.

"Whatever will the neighbors be sayin' you kissin' me in uniform over the gate so?" a flame-eared Seamus spluttered as soon as his mouth was free.

"Eeejit." Maura grinned up at him, hands still soft against his cheeks. "There's nothing anyone could say if you were to take it into your head to marry me."

Suddenly shy, Shay laughed as he always did when embar-

assed and tongue-tied.

"Oh, you! All you can do is laugh like that policeman on that silly old record!" Maura stamped on the gravel and ran into the house. But before the year was out, her policeman stopped laughing long enough to take her to wife and move into the house on Tritonville Road where Aunt Mae welcomed him with open arms.

And so the calender fluttered into the seventies with only one thorn in their happiness; the lack of a child. But the world around them was fast changing. Front door keys that had spent their lives in locks were taken inside by their owners, peep-hole appeared in doors, crooklocks on the steering wheels of parked cars. Cycles, both motor and pedal, were chained to railing like Suffragettes.

"The Irishtown-Sandymoun District of Dublin had been caught up in the thing called 'progress.' Housebreaking and vandalism crept along the Georgian terrace like rising damp. A patrol car came to cruise the area at frequent intervals both night and day. It was soon after this happened that the assaults began.

All over Dublin, from Finglas to Terenure, banks were being robbed, Rathmines boasted its own private rapist, so it seemed only fair that Sandymount should have a Phantom Attacker, as some enterprising reporter dubbed the creature who preyed on the

helpless, the elderly and, eventually, on Seamus Kelly's small family.

Shay was by the Village Green chatting with the newsagent on that rainy day-before-Christmas afternoon when one of the Ryan boys ran up screeching that he should come quick. Off he went after the child, long legs devouring the sidewalk.

On rounding a corner Kelly slid to a halt at the mouth of a laneway clogged now by a police car, an ambulance and the curious who spring up like dragon's teeth on the site of a catastrophe.

Oh God, it's another one! Kelly thought, recalling three similar scenes he had been witness to over the past six months. Scenes involving an old woman, a crippled girl and a blind man, all victims of the Phantom Attacker. For a moment he watched, wondering why he had been called when every necessary aid was already at the scene.

And then the hand gripped his arm. "Sorry, Shay," a voice said. "Sorry."

Kelly's eyes took in the scattered packages, the torn shopping bag and, lastly, came to rest on the blanket-wrapped figure being wheeled over to the ambulance. Suddenly, the word "sorry" struck home, reverberating in his head, "Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry," as he followed the stretcher into the ambulance, dread that it was Maura lying

there holding his heart in a vice.

The attendant lifted a corner of the blanket and the tall Guard looked down at a little face which had slipped to one side beneath a jumble of brains, hair, hat and bone.

"Aw, Aunt Mae," he whispered. Then nausea sought his mouth and he stumbled outside to lean against an ivied wall until the wave of sickness had passed.

"Who found her?" Kelly asked when he was able. The Ryan boy who had fetched him from the Green stepped forward. Flushed with importance, the child stood cockily aware that all eyes rested upon him. *Ah, it is a celebrity you are now, boy,* Seamus thought, with a rush of anger. "Well, Boy?" he asked.

"Well what?" the kid said, looking around at his audience.

"Don't be cheeky," one of the cops from the car said. "Just tell the Guard exactly what happened so." He moved close to the boy.

"Well—I was goin' to get Mum a paper at Finn's and there was old Miss Byrne lyin' on the pavement over there." He bobbed his head towards the scattered packages wiping his lips with his tongue. "She was still alive when I found her. Wished me a happy Christmas, so she did."

"So why didn't you come for me right away?" Kelly asked.

"I ran to the Barracks," the kid said and Mae Byrne's dead

face rose in Kelly's mind with horrid clarity. That face couldn't have spoken.

"You must have dreamed it, Lad, she never could have spoken with her head stove in like it was," Kelly said.

"I can't help her head was stove in; she wished me happy Christmas." Kelly hunkered down beside the boy and put a hand on his arm.

"Exactly what were the words Miss Byrne said?"

"I donno for sure like you know; but it was something Nollaig. The Nollaig part she said twice."

"You must be mistaken." Seamus rose, joining his height to the car cop's. "He's mistaken, Aunt Mae had no Irish, I doubt she even knew the Irish word for Christmas."

"She did say it, she *did!*" the boy piped, "I heard her. She said it twice. *Noll aig, Noll aig.*" She said it slow like that."

Finished, the child turned his back, chin set. And then the cars and people melted away, leaving the laneway empty except for Aunt Mae's nephew by marriage and a nondescript dog nosing a small pool of blood.

The time had come for Seamus to tell his six-months-pregnant wife the news that would shock her into hospital where she would lose the baby they had tried so many years to conceive.

The next few weeks passed in a numb blur. There was the post

mortem funeral and burial. The coroner's inquest, which brought in the verdict of "death by misadventure caused by persons unknown" and the prolonged illness of Maura Kelly. But when at last his wife was safe at home, the newly serious, unlaughing policeman's mind lasered onto finding the killer.

Each time he passed the desk Sergeant his eyebrows raised the question of what progress had been made. Each time the Sergeant shook his head until the day he blasted Kelly.

"Get off my back!" he said, going on to complain about the work load, citing the growing pile of unsolved car thefts, house breakings, the number of dips and shoplifters running around Dublin with impunity, stuffing their pockets full.

"You name it, it's all pilin' up here by the minute. We don't have enough men and you bloody well know it. With criminals carrying guns like now, who wants to join a force of underpaid cops with nothing except a baton to wave off the bullets with."

He held up a hand to silence any remark Kelly might make. "I know you have a personal interest in the this 'Phantom' yoke, but the law will catch up with whoever it is eventually. Until then . . ." The Sergeant shrugged. And so Kelly went to Pearse Street to see the Inspector.

From the Inspector he found

out that to all intents and purposes it was his Aunt's fault she had died. Her skull was unusually fragile. This fact Kelly already knew from the autopsy report. He was also told to keep his nose out of it, a suggestion already put forward by his Desk Sergeant.

"It's not your problem, Kelly—I realize you have a personal interest. The more reason for you not to become involved. Your duty is to take care your round is safe."

"Yeah, by takin' bottles from skinheads so they won't be breakin' street lamps or keepin' babies from picking flowers in the Green."

But the Inspector had already gone back to the pile of folders on the desk in front of him.

And so it went, with everyone telling him to stay out of it, let the file sink out of sight in the growing welter of unsolved cases. Banks were still being robbed all over Dublin. The Rathmines rapist was still making headlines on days devoid of other sensation, but the Phantom Attacker had gone to ground. Out of sight, out of mind, it seemed to Kelly as he walked 'round and 'round, stopping a punch-up in a pub, catching a car thief or two, taking down what was missing in a housebreaking.

ONCE AGAIN KELLY made the trip Downtown. This time he picked the office of the Special Branch at Dublin Castle.

"There's nothing Special Branch can do for you. It's not dope or counterfeiting or murder or poteen, illegal whiskey that is," the man in the grey suit told him.

"Sure an' it was murdered Mae Byrne was so!" Kelly shouted, lapsing into the bogs of Clare and, as he did it, knowing the Culchie accent lessened him in the eyes of this deskbound U.C.D. graduate in front of him.

"Manslaughter. The death was accidental because her . . . " He paused to refer to the folder Kelly had brought with him. "It says here, 'skull was unusually delicate—'"

"Sure an' I'm after knowin' all that, but—"

"Delicate. There was no weapon, no fingerprints, no clues at all. The Guards will just have to wait until he strikes again."

"Kill again, more like." With tongue carefully curbed, Kelly enunciated: "There was a clue. She spoke before she died." Again the Special Branch referred to the folder.

"Ah yes, here it is, Paddy Ryan, the boy who found her. Ah, yes." The man looked up. "So why shouldn't an Irish woman say Christmas in her native tongue?" He fingered a gold ring on his lapel which declared him a bona fide Irish speaker. "She was, after all, coming home from the shops on Christmas Eve. Perhaps she was worried about

her shop—”

“But like I keep sayin’, there was not a word of Irish she was knowin’, not one, not even place names. She thought all the fuss over speakin’ Irish was a waste—”

“—shopping. Everyone knows ‘Nollaig’. It’s even on the Christmas stamps.” Folding up the file, the detective handed it to Kelly. “You’d be well advised to get this right back to the Barracks before anyone discovers it’s missing.”

But Seamus did not take the file right back to the station. He made a detour past a photocopy shop in Dawson street. He wanted all known information at his fingertips if he were going to try to track down the “Phantom.”

God, it sounds like something out of a comic book, he thought. Perhaps he was behaving like a comic-book character himself, but he couldn’t bear to see his wife’s haunted eyes bleak with the knowledge that she never could have another child. Perhaps the ghost would be laid when the culprit were caught and punished.

Then they could adopt a baby and Maura would go back to being her own sweet self. Shay clung to this hope, a straw in a sea of uncertainty which daily grew more vast. So much time had been wasted in waiting as his superiors had advised.

Easter had come and gone, soon it would be summer and then Christmas again. If anything was going to be done, he, Seamus

Kelly, would have to get the lead out.

For a start he decided to check the three other assault victims in the event one of them might recall something that hadn’t found its way into the file. The first to be struck down was a Kathleen Joyce, widow, 67, who lived in a bedsitter on Claremont.

At the address given, a blue-jeaned girl answered Kelly’s knock. She evidently didn’t recognize him out of uniform because in reply to his request to see Mrs. Joyce, she informed him the old girl had been removed to Glasnevin cemetery in February.

The crippled girl who lived a few doors away had gone to Manchester to live and neither her father nor her mother seemed to know anything beyond what had been recorded in schoolboy ballpoint by one of the duty Guards at the Barracks. Nor were they interested in catching the “Phantom.”

It had been terrible, they agreed, but now that “Mary is safe in England with her married sister and her family, the whole desperate thing has been forgotten, thanks be to God.” The door was closed firmly in Shay’s face.

That left Declan Fogarty, the blind man who lived just past the cinema on Serpentine.

“I thought I’d put all that behind me last October,” Fogarty said, closing out the gusty after-

noon. "But as long as you're here, you might as well have a cup of tea."

The Alsatian, who answered the door with the blind man, having sensed no threat to his master from Shay, retired to the hearth rug.

"You've made a friend." Fogarty grinned as he heard the dog thump down in front of the fire. "Mannix has been very careful who he allows near me since the —" He rubbed the side of his head. "You warm yourself by the fire. I'll just be a minute." Kelly watched the blind man move confidently from the room.

"You certainly get around well. I'm always bumpin' into everything myself," Kelly said, scratching the sable rear shoved up against his knee.

"I ought to know my way around this place pretty good. I've lived here for almost twenty years," Fogarty said, carrying in a tray loaded with tea things. "Shocking cold for this time of year."

"Can I help you with that?" Seamus asked as Declan deftly set the tray on a table between the two fireside chairs.

"No at all. Don't be shy now, help yourself." Over tea, Kelly took Fogarty over everything that happened when he had been attacked. He had been walking along Herbert Road towards Tritonville with Mannix on his right when suddenly he felt some-

one beside him.

Almost immediately something heavy came down on Fogarty's head, and he fell over as Mannix leaped the attacker. He heard a yelp of pain and then he must have passed out. At first he thought Mannix had been hurt but he had a vet check him over and there wasn't a mark on the dog.

"How soon after the attack did you have the dog checked?"

"That same day. You see, I wasn't badly hurt. Perhaps because I'm blind, I sensed the weapon coming towards me and dodged. Who knows. But aside from a bad headache and a sore shoulder, I came through it pretty well."

"You must have been imaginin' the yelp so."

"Ah, I thought of that but it pleases me to think that Mannix might have bit him." Kelly took the photo copy of the file out of his pocket and glanced through it.

"Sure, there's not a word in the record about any biting."

"I mentioned it at the time, but perhaps it wasn't important."

Feeling that at last he had a valid clue with which to begin an investigation, Kelly went back to see the Inspector at Pearse Street only to be told he would be transferred to County duty if he persisted to be a nuisance.

So Shay began checking hospital records in casualty on his

own time. First the hospitals nearby were eliminated before Kelly took in those farther and farther afield. But no resident or Irishtown or Sandymount had been treated for dogbite during October, 1976.

Of course, there was no reason why treatment couldn't have been sought anywhere in Ireland, North or South, or in England for that matter. Distances were so small. But Kelly didn't think the attacker had left the neighborhood. He went back to see Declan Fogarty.

"Do you think Mannix would recognize the 'Phantom' if he came across him again?" Shay asked.

"He would, o' course. He's passed us in the village two or three times and my gentle, dignified pair o' eyes does his nut, don't you, young f'la?" The big dog thrust his head beneath his master's hand.

"Well, so. I'll start on the doctors in private practice and get back to you. It might just be the proof we need, Mannix's identification."

Early in June, the weather dried for a few days before settling down for a cool wet summer. Peace marches, union disputes and bomb scares drew policemen away from their districts for overtime duty in the City Center. Tourists flocked to the land of Brian Boru, adding to the problems of the already

understaffed Garda Siochana. The crab grass of crime was thick underfoot and Kelly's time off became nonexistent.

October came, foreigners gave the land back to the natives, the borrowed Guards were returned to their districts, and life settled down until the next influx from across the water. But when Seamus Kelly did have free time again it seemed pointless for him to go back to searching doctor's records. He must have read a million names, none of which led him a fraction of an inch closer to bagging the "Phantom." Then he had another idea. He went back to see Fogarty.

"You said the dog knew the man," Shay began when Declan answered the door.

The blind man nodded.

"Would you be mindin' if I borrowed Mannix? Took him on my round so?" Shay went on, "You know o' course without the harness he'd look like any other Alsatian."

Fogarty shook his head. "He wouldn't go with you, sure he wouldn't. You're a one-man dog, am'n't you, Mannix?" The dog's tail thumped the floor.

"Well now, perhaps we could do it another way. If Mannix sees him again you could follow him and—" Kelly hit his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Bloody hell! Declan, how could I be suggestin' anything so daft? It's gettin' to me, so it is!"

THE FIRST BREAKTHROUGH came in the middle of December. A nurse named Gemma Murray left a message at the police station asking Kelly to contact her. When he went off duty, he phoned her from the pub next door. She told him that the doctor she had worked for had been burned to death in the spring when he tried to rescue his daughter. His Victorian house had gone up like tinder.

"Of course, all his records went, too," she said. "But someone did come in with a badly infected hand. I went on a four-week holiday in October last year, that's why I remember so well. Maureen, the nurse who took over me, was worried because the dressing was overdue to be changed and there was some question about whether the small finger would be amputated."

She said she would write Maureen, who was a pediatric nurse in a Leeds hospital, and let him know when she had an answer. Before hanging up, Kelly asked who had given her his name.

"A nurse I know said the lovely Culchie Cop in Sandymount was looking for an October dog-bite."

The phone went dead.

On the way home, Shay dropped by the church. He wanted to arrange for a mass to be said on the anniversary of his Aunt's

death, though he didn't doubt but what Mae Byrne often found her way into Father Sullivan's prayers. They had played together as children.

"I was just thinkin' of Mae Byrne," the grey-haired priest told Seamus. His voice loud, lifted above the surge of organ music which filled the church. "I always do when Noel Egan's up there playin' Bach. Mae loved to hear him play. Sure, I can almost see her sittin' over there now with that little smile of hers lightin' up the church." He sighed. "Ah, it was an awful pity, sure it was."

"I'm tryin' to find him, you know," Shay said.

"I hope you do find him, may God forgive me. Had it not been for my vocation, my path would have been layin' alongside Mae Byrne's," the old man murmured. "Sometimes it's difficult bein' a priest," he added.

"I wish you weren't on nights over the Christmas," Maura's voice was wistful. "Sure, I don't know what to say beyond signin' me name." The Kellys were sitting at the kitchen table, writing Christmas cards. "You think you could get the duty changed just this once?"

"There's not much to do, roster's already posted, Maura love."

"Nollaig," she said, pasting a moistened stamp on an envelope.

"Father Sullivan's saying mass today."

"I wonder if it comes from Strongbow."

"Strongbow?" Shay looked up from the envelope he was addressing.

"When he came over from Normandy in the Conquest, he probably spoke French, you now." She pushed the strip of stamps towards him. Each one showed a Nativity scene with *Nollaig 1978-Eire* printed across the bottom. "The Noll part could be from the French Noel," she said, but her voice held no interest. She was just talking for talking's sake.

"Umm," Shay said, staring at the word *Nallaig* and hearing the Ryan boy. "She said it twice—'Noll Aig Noll Aig' She said it slow like that."

The priest had said Noel Egan was playing the organ. If as he said, Aunt Mae had loved to listen to him play—Noel Egan was what she had been saying or his name wasn't Seamus Kelly.

"I have to go out," he said, haste to rise knocking over his chair. But Maura didn't seem to notice. She had gone back inside her thoughts.

Without bothering to put on a coat Seamus ran through the cold rain to find out from Father Sullivan where Noel Egan lived.

"Oaklands by the railroad tracks," the priest told him.

A nice looking woman in the middle forties answered Kelly's

knock and said that her son Noel should be back soon. Elocution had wiped all character from her speech.

"Come in, if you're going to wait. There's no use to get wetter." She began making last minute adjustments to her face in front of the hall mirror. "I'm on my way to work, the Pretty Me Boutique. This is our busiest season. I guess you're here about Noel." Her fingers moved to fluff the hennaed curls framing her face. "He's a prodigy, you know, just turned fourteen though you'd never know it to look at him." She turned her head this way and that to judge the effect achieved.

"Well I'm on my way," she said, and was gone in a red Audi. Kelly followed her out of the house.

A kid, he thought, watching the rain spatter away the dry spot where the car had stood. In his mind he saw the Ryan boy looking at him. Paddy Ryan, fourteen years old was at the neither-fish-nor-foul stage. A kid like that wasn't a likely candidate for the "Phantom." He wondered why Father Sullivan hadn't mentioned Egan was a child unless, of course—he prodded his mind like a sore tooth.

"Unless nothing," he said out loud as somebody wearing rain gear and a so'wester got off a bicycle, walked it in the gate and chained it to the fence. As the

newcomer came towards the house he removed the hat to reveal the face of a petulant child.

"Noel Egan?" Seamus asked.

"Yes." The boy went into the house, shedding his waterproofs as he went. His mother had said he was fourteen "but you'd never know it to look at him." She should have added "from the neck down!"

Noel Egan was six feet of middle-aged flab with the face of a cherub on a bedpost and the high-pitched voice of a ten year old.

"I'd like to talk to you," Seamus said, following him into the dining room where the boy poured himself four fingers of Irish whiskey and downed it neat.

"I just played a lunchtime concert at St. Anne's and I'm all wrung out," the man-boy said by way of explanation. "Why aren't you on your beat?"

"Does your mother know . . . " Shay gestured towards the bottle on the sideboard.

"She does of course. Bet you didn't think I know you're from the cop-shop."

"And your father?"

"I'm a bast—" the boy shuddered. "A love child." He moved towards the back of the house. "You want to hear me play, Mr. Kelly?"

"Guarda Kelly."

"You're not in uniform." The boy led the way into a room lined with Fiberglass squares. "Sound-

proofing for the organ." He patted the instrument on the way to lighting the bottle-gas heater standing against the wall. "It's cold in here," Egan said.

"Have you been in this house long?"

"Year and a half. Before that we lived in London. Before that, Cork. Mother's going to London over the Hols."

"Holidays. You're after bein' in Ireland, you know. Am'n't you going to London, too?"

"I stay here. She has her own life, you know." Noel Egan began playing reggae, body swaying in tempo. "Gran will probably come up from Wexford." His hands danced over keyboards and stops. "Mam hates it when I play this stuff." Kelly watched the boy play. "See this scar?"

Egan waved his right hand towards the Guard, small eyes glittering with evil glee. The puckered scar was on the fleshy part of the hand just below the little finger.

"How did it happen?" Shay was puzzled; the boy seemed to be taunting him by brazenly calling his attention to the scar.

"A dog bit me." The answer came quickly. "And that's all I'm going to tell you." The music grew wild, the volume of sound almost unbearable in the small room. "There's nothing you can do to make me!" Egan's high-pitched voice screeched above the music.

Oh, isn't there, me lad. Shay thought, but he didn't move. Kelly was a slow man to act and when he did it was only after long and careful thought. Reaching down, he pulled the organ's plug from the electronic socket. The silence was deafening.

"You say there's nothing I can do to make you tell. Right." Shay turned on his heel and left.

The music was going full blast when Kelly returned with Declan Fogarty and Mannix in tow. The door at the end of the hall was open just as he had left it. When Kelly first told the blind man where they were going, Fogarty thought there was some mistake. But on entering the house, any reservations he may have had were wiped away by the dog's reaction.

A growl rumbled from deep within the dog. His lips curled back in a snarl as he lunged his master toward the swell of the organ. Shay followed close behind. Egan, engrossed in the music, was unaware of the animal until he was almost upon him. Then everything happened at once.

"*I can't hold him!*" Fogarty cried, both hands gripping the harness. The music stopped. Egan plastered himself on the wall farthest from the enraged animal.

"*Keep him off!*" he screamed, trying to force himself yet further away.

"*Tell me about it!*" Kelly shouted.

"Oh, my God! Sure he'll have my arm from the socket!"

The dog reared his head on a level with Fogarty's, straining towards Noel Egan, forefeet clawing in the air.

"*Tell me!*" Kelly shouted again. Mannix was fast closing the distance between himself and his quarry.

"All right! All right! Keep him off!" shrieked the small-boy voice. Shay helped the blind man struggle the maddened animal from the house.

Beyond slipping down to the floor, Noel Egan hadn't moved. His face was streaked with tears and he was sucking a handkerchief when Kelly came into the room.

"Well?" he said, looking down at the boy.

"What is it I'm supposed to say?" he mumbled almost unintelligibly. Kelly grabbed the cloth out of Egan's mouth.

"Give over that thing. You a baby or something?" The Guard stuffed the damp handkerchief into his pocket.

"I didn't steal. You can't call me a thief. I didn't take anything."

"What's that got to do with attacking innocent people?"

Suddenly the dam burst, words came tumbling from the too-small pink mouth.

"They made fun of me! Every-

one makes fun of me because I'm so big—Fatso they call me! *Fatso!*" His voice squealed high. "They laughed at me, the girl, your old aunt, the—give me back my sue!"

The scarred hand grabbed towards Kelly's pocket. "I want my sue!"

"Is that what the wet rag is? All right, they were after makin' fun of you. But what about Declan Fogarty?" Kelly asked the weeping boy. "Fogarty didn't make fun of you, he's blind." Noel Egan turned away and when again he faced Kelly, his expression was a study in sly cruelty.

"They're not the only ones, you know—and there's not a thing you can do to stop me!" The boy went back to playing the organ. "Anyway, when all that happened I wasn't old enough to be legally responsible." His hand striped a glissando on the keyboard. "There's nothing you can do. Ireland has no Borstals, no kind of prisons for kids."

--"We'll see about that, me lad. You're coming with me. Get on your coat." With an insolent shrug, Egan obeyed.

The Inspector listened to Seamus Kelly. He questioned the overgrown and ridiculous but polite and articulate boy. Mrs. Egan was brought from her boutique. The two spent a half hour in the Inspector's office while Kelly paced outside the closed door.

Then the door opened and amid official apologies the woman went back to her shop; the boy went back to his organ, but not without tipping a sly wink at Kelly in passing. Shay, after being cautioned by the Inspector, was sent back to Irishtown.

"Excuse me, Sir, but before I go could you be tellin' me what the boy said?"

"You intimidated him with a mad dog. Naturally, he said what you wanted to hear. Now be off with you and remember what I said, forget the Egan boy."

KELLY'S FOOTSTEPS echoed along the deserted streets past houses, past shops, rain was falling now from the swollen clouds. Wind whipped the short cape around his thighs. Still he had come to no satisfactory decision. He thought of the appalling upsurge of child crime.

Until recently discipline had been the father's responsibility. There were no Borstals in the Irish Republic, no facilities to care for juvenile delinquents, Egan was right. He thought of the kids who had burned down the bookshop on Dawson Street. They had been let go after a few days because there wasn't any place in which to keep them except an adult prison.

No judge would put a child in prison with old lags, hardened criminals to teach said child the tricks of their trade. Kelly's mind

dwelt on a father's responsibility but Noel Egan didn't have a father nor was his mother any noticeable deterrant.

She was a little better than a middle-aged delinquent herself haring off to London, leaving her son on his own, never mind the grandmother would be coming up from Wexford. Kelly had seen no grandmother. The boy was rattling around in the big old house near the railroad tracks all by himself.

In a way, the boy being alone was a sign of the times. More than half the houses on Kelly's beat had been cut up into self-sufficient cubicles geared to the single dweller. Of course, they came together, queueing for bath, toilet or telephone. Some of these kids living alone were only fractionally older than Noel Egan.

That was what had gone wrong. People wanted things, not each other, except on occasion for personal satisfaction. No one wanted responsibility. Kelly thought of his father, who had reared six boys and two girls after his wife had died, not one delinquent among them. It was probably the Auld One's razor strop that had kept their toes on the line. Not that the strop had come into use often, but it had always been there as a reminder.

Perhaps a taste of his father's leather would straighten out the Egan boy. It was packed in the old man's box in the attic room

two floors above Maura and her sleepless eyes. Yes, he could always give the boy a good hiding, beat him within an inch of his life.

But before taking the law into his own hands, one final effort should be made, to remove him to a place where he could receive mental care until such time when he was old enough to go to prison.

"... and if I can get down on tape what he was sayin' to me the other day, I'll take it to our TD and, Bob's your uncle, the boy will be locked up in St. Brendan's until he's old enough for Mountjoy."

"What makes you have so much faith a Member of Parliament would do anything more than your man, the Inspector?" Declan Fogarty asked, scrambling eggs.

"Who else is there? I can't go to Jack Lynch, though why the Prime Minister wouldn't be as good as any other man . . . ? Anyway, will you come with me?" The cassette recorder that had belonged to Kelly's Aunt Mae was hanging from a strap over his shoulder.

"One sight of Mannix and we won't be able to stop him talkin' and when he does we'll record what he says over his own organ music. Aunt Mae taped him when he was playin' in church. She used to listen to it while she painted her pictures, and me not even knowin' it was the Egan yoke playin'."

Fogarty set out bread and m and spooned the eggs onto plates.

"Eat up. You can use a bit of good walkin' around all night. When we'll be goin'."

Though it was past eight-thirty the time the two men and the listling dog waited for Noel Egan to open the door, daylight still hadn't managed to locate Dublin amid the murky damp.

"Are you sure the kid is home?" Fogarty asked.

"And where else would he be?" Footsteps sounded inside the house. A curtain was moved to the side revealing Egan's face, the cloth fell back into place. Two bolts on the front door shot home.

"The door was unlocked. We could have walked in," Fogarty remarked.

"That would be breaking and entering," Kelly said. "No, we'll do this legal and proper."

"Legal? With a tape recorder?" But Kelly wasn't listening. His attention was focussed at the side of the house. A door slammed. There was the sound of running feet.

"Hey, Egan! Stop! Bloody hell! He's headed for the railroad track!" Shay shouted, pounding after the boy. Mannix lunged, sinking away from Fogarty, who, losing his footing, sprawled in the gravel.

"Stop!" Kelly yelled, as Mannix streaked past him to shorten

the distance between himself and the boy. "Stop! A train's due!" He shouted, but Noel Egan, with Mannix close behind, hurtled on. A train rumbled towards the Serpentine Avenue crossing.

"Noel! The train! The train!" Kelly screamed.

The boy heard nothing, was aware of nothing except the lethal teeth snapping ever closer to his heels. Suddenly, he whirled, his foot shot out, catching the Alsatian in the side of the head, tumbling him backwards. Then the boy's big body lifted high in the air as he vaulted over the railroad barrier. For a long moment the headlight on the engine picked out the flying coat, the flailing limbs, the screaming face. The train, car after car, rattled past.

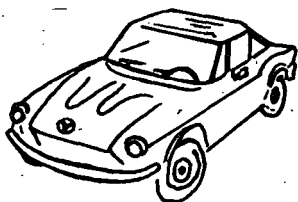
Kelly stopped in his tracks. Mannix picked himself up and went to find his master. A crowd began to form around the shape sprawled on the sleepers between the rails.

"If he'd only stayed in the house," Shay said as Declan came up beside him. "He was safe in there, locked away."

"Locked away," Fogarty echoed. His hand, finding Kelly's shoulder slid down the leather strap until it reached the cassette recorder, he pressed it on. The rich tones of a pipe organ soared with the growing daylight. Noel Egan was playing his own requiem.

THE BEIGE MERCEDES

by KENNETH GARVELL



It Couldn't Happen in the Canadian Woods, but It Did — and There Was Harry Donaldson Very Dead and No Visible Clue to His Murderer.

THE FIRST MINUTE I laid eyes on that car it gave me an eerie feeling. You get that way after a while on my job—a street is too quiet, a guy has his coat buttoned funny, a house is breathing differently. You develop invisible antennae for the not-quite-right. Needless to say, I'm a cop.

Missing Persons Division for over nine years now. But I was off-duty that evening—about as off-duty as you can get. Harry Donaldson, a friend of mine from Records, and myself were on a fishing trip up in northern Ontario, and for six days now we hadn't thought of anything more (or less) important than finding big northern pike.

We were among the few bachelors in the department, and for

the last three summers we had taken our vacations at the same time to travel up to Canada and fish. It was a contest which of us was the bigger fanatic (or lunatic if you feel that way about fishermen).

We would get up at eight every morning and drive into the woods looking for lakes full of giant voracious fish. These lakes are too easy to come by these days even in Canada, and we had covered quite a bit of territory.

We would flail the water in the dark, then head for a lodge or motel. Today, we had really gotten off the beaten track, forcing Harry's old Ford over muddy rutted logging roads that tried their best to pull off the exhaust

ystem. It was close to sundown, about nine, when we saw the car.

A light beige Mercedes, clean and very new, sitting all by itself what looked like it was one day going to be a picnic area when they finished laying out grass and gravel. There was a structure in the middle of the clearing that was probably going to be a protective roof for a picnic table, though now it was only half built.

The dirt road circled this structure, around the perimeter of the clearing, and joined itself again at the exit. From the logging road we had been on, you could see the clearing and the lake beyond (which was why we pulled in) but the car itself had been parked so that it was out of sight until you entered the area.

I didn't know what the hell a prospective picnic area was doing here in the middle of nowhere, let alone a car which definitely had not been made for roads like we'd been all afternoon.

"Well, somebody got here before us," Harry said.

"Looks that way. Don't see it."

"He's probably down at the water."

"I guess. I'll get out and look around."

Harry pulled the car to the side of the clearing opposite the Mercedes and parked. There was nobody in sight and not a sound except insect noises. I got out and

walked to the edge of the clearing facing the lake.

Here there was a steep brushy drop to the water about forty feet below. I worked down the slope a little way in my clumsy wading boots until I had a clearer view of the shoreline in each direction. It looked like good pike water—the amber color of rum with a lot of submerged wood and some scattered reed beds.

It seemed to drop off pretty quick, but the shoreline could be waded. There was no one on the shoreline. There was no one in a boat on the lake.

I walked back to the car.

"Looks good," I said. "We should give it a try."

"See the guy who owns that car?"

I shook my head.

"Maybe he's hunting," Harry suggested.

"For what? Everything worth shooting is out of season."

"Then where is he?"

I shrugged my shoulders and started to get my rod out of the car. I tore off the last foot or so of monofilament, which was badly frayed, tied on the metal leader again and selected one of my favorite searching lures from my box—a surface plug with a tail spinner. Meanwhile, Harry had sauntered his big, balding frame over to the deserted Mercedes. I saw him looking inside. He walked around the car and then back to me.

"Keys in the ignition," he said. "This is 1979, isn't it?"

"Probably didn't expect anyone to come by here in a million years," I said.

"Still, you don't leave a car for a long time without locking the doors and taking the keys."

Just then I heard a splash out on the lake. I knew that sound very well—a fish jumping. I saw the rings on the slightly ruffled water.

"You see *that*?" I said, pointing. "That's what we're here for. Next week we go back to being cops, but this week I don't give a damn about cars that give out funny vibrations."

I started toward the slope, angling to the right where the water looked better to me and easier to wade.

"You give it a try," Harry said. "Yell if it's worth the effort of my going down. I get tired this late in the day."

I glanced back as I entered the brush. As I expected, he had pulled out a pen to take down the license number. I'd already noted it was an Ontario plate. I guess you just can't be a cop some of the time—no matter how much you may want to be.

I waded out knee deep and cast toward where I had seen the rise. Nothing. I fanned out my casts with no takers and then started up to the right along the shoreline. Ten minutes later, I had only one missed strike to show for my efforts, and he hadn't looked very

big. So much for a lake's appearance.

I waded back along the log-strewn shoreline toward the car. The shore itself was too densely wooded for easy walking. Harry would be smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer. That's what I should have been doing.

It was nearly dark. The lake was very peaceful, a narrow orange band of sky edging the dark tree line of the opposite shore. No fish were jumping. Only the insects seemed active. Some of them were actively biting me.

I climbed out of the water and clumped up through the brush and rocks to the clearing. The Mercedes was still there. Both cars were darkening to silhouettes in the rapidly fading light. Harry seemed to be asleep in the driver's seat of the Ford. I called but he didn't respond. What the hell, I'd wake him up and tell him I'd got three big ones.

"Time to wake up," I called through the open window. He didn't move a muscle. "Christ, you must have been tired," I said, banging him on the shoulder. He slumped to the right, away from the window.

I flicked on my lighter for a closer look. The left side of his face had been hit hard and more than once with something heavy, something that could kill a man. The face was bloody and the bone structure caved in. Harry was dead.

My thumb automatically released its pressure on the lighter, and I was aware that I was trembling all over. I felt very cold. I held onto the car window for support because my legs suddenly felt like sponge. That's when the shot came.

It came from the direction of the clearing's entrance and of the beige Mercedes. I saw the flash out of the side of my eye just at the instant I heard the crack. Then I ran. I ran instinctively away from the direction of the shot and into the thick woods next to the car. A second shot cracked as I threw myself into the trees.

I ran in quite a ways and stopped as suddenly as I'd started, heaving myself down in the heavy brush. The last echoes of the second shot had faded, swallowed in the abrupt return of silence. The only sounds I heard were my own labored breathing and the loud pumping of my heart.

I lay absolutely motionless, an animal at bay, and listened for anything that would indicate what that other person with the gun was doing, where he was. I heard nothing. My breathing began to slow down but my heart was still pumping furiously. Some crazy son of a bitch out there had decided to kill me!

I don't know how much time passed. It became perfectly dark. Nothing had moved near enough for me to notice. Was he waiting? Why not? Where could I go? There

wasn't a house or a town for twenty miles as far as I knew, and no other road out than the one we'd taken.

Either I had to get to the car—which would be what he was sitting there waiting for—or else try to get to the road outside the clearing. But the road curved away from the lake on this side of the entrance and that would mean a bit of walking, even if I could find it in the dark and in my psychological condition.

Meanwhile he'd hear me moving in this thick brush and move in himself for the kill. He wasn't going to let me get away. Whoever this maniac was, he had made up his mind to that.

Don't ever believe that cops don't get scared. That's only true of the ones on the TV shows. I've never known a cop who didn't shake in his pants when he was in real trouble. There are some cities where they shake just walking down certain streets. I'd been in a few bad spots over the years and I'd been scared each and every goddamned time.

But you're less scared with a weapon. Harry and I hadn't brought any guns with us into Canada. First of all, we didn't think we'd need them for the fish, and secondly they cause you a mess of red tape at the border. But what I would have given for a gun now! Any gun—even one of those old-model Colt .45's that might hit a billboard at twenty

yards if you're lucky.

I didn't even have the fishing rod. I'd dropped it at the car. I had nothing but a pair of torn, trembling hands. To make things a bit worse, my boots were clumsy and noisy. The first thing I had to do was get them off. Without making a sound. Nice trick.

I reached my arm down and unsnapped the right belt strap as softly as I could. He couldn't hear that unless he was very near. Then I reached inside the boot and unsnapped the knee strap. Even less noise. Inch by inch I eased down the boot-top, my leg slightly raised from the ground, until I'd got it to my knee.

The last part was the hardest. I curved my body into a really strange position and tugged the boot off slowly, slowly from the bottom half of my leg. The whole process took about five minutes. Then I began on the left boot.

So here was Detective Lieutenant Bob Timothy, Missing Persons Division, lying on the damp floor of a Canadian forest and about to become a missing person himself. No gun, no shoes, a legion of obnoxious insects doing their damndest to crawl up his nose, while he waited for some homicidal nut nearby to make his move. Well, the move finally came—a flashlight.

A powerful one, the kind that you hold by a handle on top. Had to be. He was slowly working it along the tree line on my side of

the clearing. He knew I hadn't gone in all that far. Of course, this showed me exactly where he was, but what did that matter? He was the one with the gun.

As near as I could make out with my face down in the dirt, he was standing between the back of his Mercedes and the entrance of the clearing. Good spot—he could keep an eye—or ear—on the clearing and on the road.

I found myself wishing he would yell something. I thought it would be less unnerving if he would yell something. A voice would humanize him for me.

But he wasn't saying anything. The light kept examining, twig by twig, the forest along my side of the clearing.

I had to do *something*. My nerves couldn't stand this indefinitely. If I stayed where I was, eventually he'd have to come in. But he'd still have the advantage of the weapon. The only real possibility I could see was the water. I was close to the slope. If I could work over the side and down to the water . . . He wouldn't be expecting that.

I had noticed earlier that while the shoreline to the right curved away from the road, that to the left cut in toward the road in a series of steep-sided coves. If I could swim past the clearing and into one of those coves, I could probably find the road. And I wouldn't have to worry about making noise while I was doing it.

When the flashlight beam had crept past me away from the water, I started. It may be possible to crawl slower and quieter than I did, but I doubt it. I tested every inch of ground before pushing forward. I didn't think he could hear a thing. In a few minutes I'd reached the edge of the drop.

I pushed my head and shoulders over and began an awkward, face-first downhill crawl. Once I almost sent a stone rolling, but I caught it in time. My head was whirling with insects, and various prickly things stabbed into my socks. But I was getting down.

The last little stretch before the water offered almost no cover. I looked back and saw that I was well below his line of sight unless he walked to the edge of the slope, so I scurried across this stretch like a paranoid cockroach and slid the front part of my body into the water.

It was cold. Even in summer, the water in northern Canada can be pretty cold. I used stones and pieces of log to pull my body forward. A couple of minutes more and I was out in water deep enough to swim. But it wasn't clear enough—full of rocks and other assorted debris that a lake builds up over the years.

I did something between sick duck-paddling and a water ballet until I got into the deeper open water. Then I started swimming underwater. I found that it was difficult to swim with my pant legs

flapping and creating a drag, so I rolled them up tightly while still under the surface, came up for some air and dove again.

I'm a pretty good swimmer, and now I was getting my chance to prove to myself just how long I could go underwater. When I finally came up again, it was as stealthily as a beaver. I seemed to be about halfway past the clearing. He was nowhere in sight along the slope. I was going to pull it off.

I filled my lungs with air and dove. I was gaining some confidence and swam even harder than before. I couldn't see a thing. When my lungs were exploding, I angled back up. But my head didn't break the back surface; instead it hit something big and soft.

I panicked. I couldn't seem to get past it. My lungs were screaming. I clawed out at the thing blocking me from the air and my fingers became entangled in something limp and stringy like seaweed. It seemed to cling to me as if trying to trap me.

With as much strength as I had left, I pulled wildly at the stringy mass and it moved and my head broke water. I lifted the soggy tangle in my hand above the surface, and it was a woman's head—long blonde hair, eyes closed, very dead.

I jerked my hand away and heard myself involuntarily letting out some sound between a stifled

yell and a half-drowned gurgle. Water got into my mouth, tasting acrid. I flung myself toward the shore and saw the flashlight beam bouncing rapidly in my direction. He had heard that.

I was just past the clearing, but I was swimming on the surface, not caring about making noise any more, and I could hear him crashing down the slope to my left. Then the light and the first shot and I dove once more. Another shot. I swam frantically in the direction of the shore. He stopped firing, waiting for me to surface.

Suddenly my kicking feet banged bottom. I pulled myself forward on submerged rocks, and when I finally broke water with my nose, I was right at the shoreline. He seemed to have lost me. I was just around the bend of the first cove and out of his sight. I was pretty close to that beige Mercedes of his.

He would still be at the water's edge. That gave me almost an even chance—better than I'd had all evening. I lunged out of the water and up the steep, brushy incline at about the fastest rate a man could on that kind of terrain without any shoes. My feet were getting cut up badly through the wool socks but I didn't really notice.

By now he must have guessed and must be running too. My breath was pounding as I broke over the top and through the trees and into the clearing. I dove for

the Mercedes. I could hear him coming right behind me as I turned the key he'd foolishly left in the ignition. It caught just as he crested the top, a thrashing silhouette against the star-studded sky.

The gun cracked and a bullet hit the roof of the car just over my head. I wanted to blind him with the headlights, but I couldn't find the goddamned switch. So as a second shot clanged somewhere in the grillwork, I gunned the motor directly at the firing silhouette, the car leaping across the short space that separated us and hitting him full with a sickening thud.

That was the first and last time I heard his voice. The Mercedes careened right over his body and started down the slope. I jammed my foot into the brakes and the big machine finally slid to a stop at the water's edge, its front wheels underwater and its grill pressed affectionately into a pile of lumber.

The motor died, and a silence shut down over everything like the end of the world. I lifted my aching head from the steering wheel and pushed open the door, which grated against sand, and walked back up that hill a whole lot slower than the last time.

I took a good look at him under his own flashlight. He was a little disarranged because of the car, but the light showed a not unhandsome face of about forty-five and a summer sports jacket and slacks that would be bought by a person

who could buy a Mercedes. Definitely an upper-middle-class homicidal maniac.

I bent down to examine his gun, but I didn't touch it; it was an old 7.65 mm. Browning. I wondered where he'd got hold of it. My guess was that it would be unregistered.

My morbid curiosity satisfied, I moved Harry's body gently to the passenger side of the old Ford and drove my friend down the long, dark road to civilization.

IT WAS AN interesting night for the Canadian cops. When I eventually located some. In those small towns they don't have regular police departments, and I had to call the telephone operator to find a cop. The town had two, both of whom had never dealt with a homicide in their lives and didn't feel any too confident about beginning now. The first thing they did was phone an SOS down to the big city.

Toronto flew up two regular Homicide boys and a police surgeon to perform the autopsies. They arrived about six in the morning. After a while, Homicide cops get a certain look about them. The older of these, named Sloan, had it. He was long past being surprised or upset by anything. He handled the bodies like not-too-interesting museum exhibits. A tobacco chewer, of all things.

The other was a younger guy of about thirty named Morrell. Morrell looked like the fresh-faced boy next door rapidly turning into a Sloan. While Sloan supervised the search of the scene, Morrell took care of getting the dented Mercedes out of the lake.

He and I struck up something like a friendship after I remarked that he wasn't too bad a guy for a cop. He liked that. I stuck around (not that I had much choice) and he kept me abreast of what was happening. They put the pieces together faster than I would have expected.

The Mercedes man was named Victor R.H. Hanning—copartner in a firm called Youth Glow Facial Creams. Some quick checking turned up that he was married, with two children. No record of any sort. The blonde girl was Carole Finley, who also worked at Youth Glow Facial Creams, but not directly under Hanning. Pretty, age twenty-four, unmarried. And, as the surgeon informed us soon after he began the autopsy, about three months pregnant.

"That's our connection," Morrell said. "Couldn't be anything else. Half of these pillars of the community have something going for them on the side. The more well-heeled they are, the better they keep it quiet."

"My guess is it'll read something like this—the girl got pregnant and started to put the

pressure on, probably for him to divorce his wife and marry her. He wasn't having any part of it—didn't want the scandal. She wouldn't agree to an abortion." Morrell spread his freckled hands expressively. "Hanning didn't see any other way out."

"Sounds like Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*," I said.

"Haven't read it," Morrell said. He stuck his feet up on the desk he'd commandeered for his stay in the wilds, and I lit a cigarette—about my fortieth that day.

"So he drives her up here to no man's land for a romantic outing or maybe a serious talk about their situation. She apparently has no suspicion of what he's got in mind. He figures that no one knows about them, and when the body's eventually found, nothing's going to connect him with the murder."

"He parks in a spot next to a lake where it looks like nobody's likely to show up for the next six months, kills her with that ancient Browning automatic he had—nice close shot in the right temple—and throws her out into the lake."

"Now all he has to do is leave, but damned if you two Yankees don't show up at just the wrong moment. He must have heard your car pull into the clearing. He hides back in the trees. He sees your friend inspecting his car and jotting down the license plate. The body's already in the lake, and anyway, what the hell else can he do with it?"

"So when you go down to fish, he creeps up on your buddy in the driver's seat and hits him real hard with a short piece of lead pipe. We found the pipe, has blood on it. God knows where he got it. When he's sure your friend's dead, he props him up again to look like he's sleeping, and waits out of sight for you. Everything fits."

He looked very satisfied. They always do when "everything fits."

I blew smoke at his shoes on the desk.

"Well?" he said finally.

"When will the surgeon finish the autopsies?" I asked.

"He figures maybe another hour."

"What have you told Hanning's wife?"

"So far, only that he had a fatal accident. I'll get Sloan to tell her the rest—he's good at those things."

"You think she suspected the affair with the blonde?"

"They usually do," Morrell said. "You married?"

"Divorced."

He was frowning by now. "You don't like it."

"It's very tidy," I said.

"But you don't like it."

"Do you mind if I tag along for a couple of days and watch you check out the leads?"

"Be my guest," Morrell said.

"It's more than curiosity," I said. "Harry was a good friend of mine."

"A rotten piece of luck," Morrell said.

"It's getting so it's hard to avoid rotten luck these days," I said.

THE SURGEON had his autopsy reports by five. There were two little surprises. The bullet he'd dug out of Carole Finley's brain was a .25 ACP and not a 7.65 or its U.S. equivalent, a .32. In addition, his opinion was that the girl had been dead several hours longer than since nine yesterday evening.

"Well, you've got yourself some work," I said to Morrell.

"You don't have to rub it in."

"When Sloan gets back from visiting the wife, I'd like to talk to him."

"You tired of Missing Persons?" Morrell said. "Want to give Homicide a try?"

"I worked Homicide for three years."

"Be my guest," Morrell said. He liked that phrase.

Sloan got in about 9:30 that evening. The Hannings lived a long way south. I was out when he showed, but Morrell informed me I could find him down at the corner in a cheap beanery named Amy's. I slipped into a dingy booth across the table from him. Sloan was having a black coffee.

"How's the coffee?"

"Rotten."

"How did it go with Mrs. Hanning?"

"Rotten."

"I see you're in a pleasant mood."

"Sorry." He spat tobacco juice out the window. No screens in Amy's.

"You didn't by any chance sneak in a hint or two about an affair with Carole Finley?"

"Would have been just about impossible to avoid it. You and Morrell can forget about that. If Hanning's wasn't a happy marriage, I'll eat my badge."

"So what does the wife think happened?"

"Believe me, she was too destroyed to talk about it. But from what she did say, I don't think she understands any more than we do. She kept repeating it just wasn't possible." He sipped his coffee with a grimace. "But being an old skeptic who doesn't like the taste of badges, I went to visit Carole Finley's apartment with two prowl car boys, and what do you think we found?"

"I give up."

"About thirty pictures of this young, good-looking guy on every available horizontal surface. So then what did I do?"

"You took one of the pictures back to Mrs. Hanning to see if she knew the guy."

"Very good. And he turns out to be named Lester Howe, who Carole is supposed to have been engaged to. At least that's what

Mrs. Hanning heard."

"There was no engagement ring on the body."

"You can be engaged without a ring. Times have changed."

"So then you went to see Howe."

"But it turns out he's out of town—in Los Angeles. He's a buyer for Sears. Flew there two days ago—coming back tomorrow."

"Could be a phony," I said.

"We'll check it out. I don't think it's a phony."

"Morrell said you wouldn't mind if I tagged along on this."

Sloan shrugged his shoulders.

MORRELL SPENT the next morning looking for his "connection" while Sloan checked on Lester Howe in Los Angeles. Morrell couldn't find any connection except that Carole Finley had worked for Hanning and his partner, Wallace McConnell, at Youth Glow. After lunch, the two of us drove the sixty miles down there.

McConnell was a man of about Hanning's age and just as nicely dressed. He had thinning hair, a bluish chin, and a slight limp that he volunteered was the result of a car accident. There was none of Hanning's ladies'-man look about him.

"It's going to be hard running the business without him," McConnell said. "I can't believe

he'd do such a thing."

"We're still trying to figure out what was between them," Morrell said.

"It's hard to figure," McConnell said. "The girl was engaged. She did nothing but talk about her fiancé, from what I hear. Still, if she and Victor *were* . . ." He let it hang.

"You have no idea why she'd be up in the woods with Hanning?"

"Not really. Unless . . ." He shrugged.

"If it's not sex, it's usually money," Morrell offered.

"Nothing of that sort that I know of," McConnell said.

It went on like that. He was about as helpful as a baseball glove in a ping-pong game. Morrell asked to have a look at Hanning's office, and McConnell ushered us in. It was pretty nice—low mahogany desk, wall to wall carpeting, real art on the walls. Between us, we gave it a thorough going-over. Result—a disguised liquor cabinet, a box of excellent Cuban cigars, a picture of his wife plus two more of his kids, and a lot of company papers.

We went up to the lab where Carole Finley had worked. It was big, modern, shiny, with plenty of Frankenstein-like apparatus. A cage of white mice in one corner, vials of pretty-colored liquids everywhere.

We talked to the two other lab workers, a young man and woman. They were as nonplused as

McConnell. Neither of them had seen Carole address Hanning except in the formal way of employee to employer. Carole herself had been the boss in the lab.

The young woman, named May, did say that for the past few weeks Carole had seemed upset about something, but perhaps she had only imagined it.

"I didn't notice anything unusual," the man said.

"Did you think her being upset had to do with her engagement?" Morrell asked the woman.

"That seemed the most obvious explanation," she agreed.

"Did you know she was pregnant?"

Her eyes opened at this. "No."

I changed the subject. "Just what do you do in here?"

"Look for ways to improve our product," the man said. "Look for spin-off products. Look for ways to save money by changing the formula. Et cetera."

"You all work together?"

"No, usually on separate projects."

"They operate a good lab," McConnell said approvingly.

The young people glowed.

"Time for us to be getting back," Morrell said.

McConnell escorted us to the elevator. I reflected that a three-floor building hardly needed an elevator. But everything indicated that Youth Glow was doing very well indeed.

By the time we returned, Sloan had confirmed that the Howe boy had in fact been in Los Angeles for three days. So much for that.

THE NEXT morning, after another night in the town's one miserable hotel, I asked my Canadian counterparts whether they would mind if I did some snooping on my own.

"Why should we mind?" Morrell said.

"I'll probably be gone most of the day."

"Fine," Sloan said. "Use your own car."

"Meet you at six for dinner," I said.

It was 6:15 when I pulled in. They were just leaving. I walked along with them to what had become their regular restaurant (there wasn't much choice)—an Italian place that served good pasta and bad steaks.

"Well, have you solved our case for us?" Sloan asked acidly.

"Maybe."

"Save it for the main course." He chuckled. Morrell just looked at me.

I didn't say a word until my cannelloni arrived.

"How did you spend the day?" Sloan asked finally.

"Driving mostly. I went back to the lab and talked to those two again and asked them who Carole Finley palled around with, and

then I went to see two or three of the pals. Then I looked up her mother and talked to her—which was not a pleasant experience—and finally I went to see Mrs. McConnell.”

“I talked to her mother,” Sloan said.

“I know.”

“Just how did you get to see these people without a badge?”

“Most people don’t look at a badge too closely. I showed mine.”

“Jesus Christ!” Sloan said.

“And what did all this driving around get you?” Morrell asked.

“A character—Carole’s. Apparently, in spite of that pregnancy, a very moral girl. The type that might sleep with a man she deeply loved, but probably wouldn’t tell a lie about something really important.”

“That’s it?” Sloan said.

“And a bit more about Mr. McConnell. Wives have a way of revealing things in spite of themselves. Mrs. McConnell doesn’t much like her husband. Apparently, to him, the business is everything. She feels she doesn’t count. They don’t have any kids.”

“All very intriguing,” Sloan said. “Where does it get us?”

“It gets us to my suggesting that you check on whether McConnell has a permit for a .25 automatic. And whether he does or not, I’d also suggest a search of his house and his office. It shouldn’t take too long to get a warrant.

And then, if you find the gun—which I think is pretty possible since he doesn’t know what we know about the autopsy—I’d suggest a ballistics test down in the big city.”

“And a motive,” Sloan said, humoring me. “Aren’t you going to give us a motive too?”

“Look,” I said, “if one thing became crystal clear to me this afternoon, it was that the only connection between Hanning and Carole Finley was the company. But Hanning didn’t kill her with his own gun, and why should he use another one since he never thought he’d be associated with Carole’s death?”

“It seems most logical that somebody else killed Carole and Hanning took care of getting rid of the body. Who would he do that for? His wife? Very unlikely in view of everything we’ve turned up so far. There really isn’t anybody left but his partner.

“So let’s say McConnell killed Carole. Why the hell would Hanning agree to help dispose of the body? Only if he had some real personal stake in Carole’s death, something important enough to justify such a risk. The same stake McConnell had.”

Sloan stopped looking bored and Morrell wasn’t swallowing any food either. I continued:

“She worked in the company lab. The answer’s got to be there. My guess is she turned up something, maybe with those white

mice, that the two partners thought was sufficient reason to get rid of her. The other lab workers were doing their own thing, and she didn't tell them what she'd found.

"From what I've learned about Carole, a girl like her wouldn't—not if she'd uncovered something of the nature I suspect. She'd go directly to the top. She did, and most likely they tried to buy her. Once again, a girl like her wouldn't be bought. McConnell had a choice—a very successful business or Carole Finley. He's not the sort of man to have to think long over that one."

I waited. Morrell lit a cigarette. Sloan leaned far back on his flimsy chair.

"I'll check on the gun permit," he said to Morrell, "while you hustle up the warrant. I think our American friend may just have bought himself a ticket to the ball game."

THE GUN was registered, all right—a Colt. The next morning they turned up the weapon itself at McConnell's house. His wife knew about it. He'd had it for years, he said as protection from burglars. By the time he became aware of what was happening and started complaining to Toronto, Morrell was already on the plane with the Colt.

The two bullets in the gun

turned out to be the same make and type as the one found in Carole Finley. Tests showed that the rifling marks also matched. Morrell flew back, and we met him at the airport the following morning and all drove down to McConnell's house. It was too early for him to be at the company.

A cleaning woman opened the door for us. She was crying. "How did you know?" she asked.

"Know what?" said Sloan, but I think he'd already guessed, just as I had.

"Mr. McConnell's killed himself!" She was one of those people who look terrible crying. I reflected that even a McConnell can have someone to cry for him after his death.

"How did he do it?" Sloan asked quietly.

"It's horrible. In the garage..."

Our eyes turned automatically in that direction.

"He's hanged himself," the old woman said. "You can't imagine..."

"Yes, I think we can imagine," Sloan said.

It took them a long time to discover what Carole Finley had learned in her laboratory. By then the company had gone out of business anyway. The essential ingredient in their formula, which had made the products so good and which had made Hanning and McConnell so much money, caused cancer.

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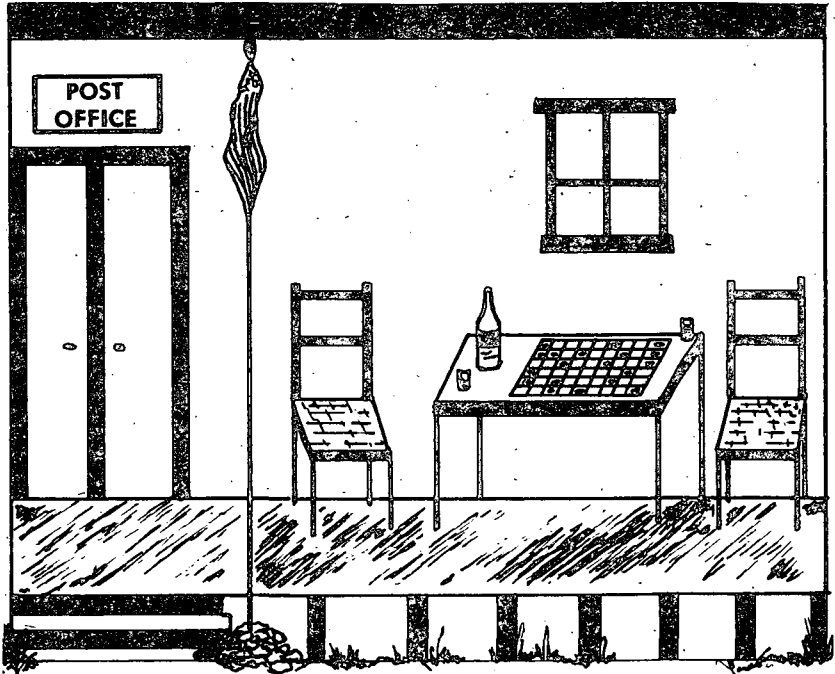
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Edward Goldstein, Publisher

THE PRICE OF PEACE



by PATRICIA L. SCHULZE

Life Was Quiet in DeWitt Crossing. Sheriff Webb Had a Foolproof System for Keeping Things that Way.

MOSE WEBB STOOD on his porch, picking bits of meat from his teeth with a wooden kitchen

match and watching the antelope in the pasture across the road. The voices of women, gossiping across

back fences now that the work of the day was done, broke the western stillness. The antelope looked up at a sudden burst of laughter, then went back to grazing, indifferent to the humans around them.

It was the way Mose remembered it from his childhood, a peaceful little town, the way he meant to keep it. For a while DeWitt Crossing had given signs of becoming like some of the other towns around, back at the start of what people liked to call the "energy crisis" and after Washington discovered there were coal and oil for the taking under the western sod.

But the few rough men who had moved in soon grew bored with the quiet lazy life of the town and moved on up north to Gillette, or further south to Casper, both of which had grown used to loud men seeking bright lights on Saturday nights.

Then there had been the drifters—folks called them hippies a few years back—college kids mostly, protesting their parents' materialistic way of life but living off the proceeds as far as Mose could figure it. He had worried some about their influence on the children of DeWitt Crossing—been proved right a few times—but he had been able to put a stop to that.

Mose dislodged the last shred of supper roast and shifted the matchstick to the right side of his mouth. He hitched the holster of

his Colt .45 around to a more comfortable position and headed downtown to relieve his new deputy.

Al Harms, the mayor, and Jud Witcomb, DeWitt's grocer and postmaster, were playing their usual checker game in front of the post office. He stopped to jaw with them for a while.

"Care for a drink, Sheriff?" asked Al, offering the bottle that stood in plain sight by the checkerboard. It was an evening ritual.

"Can't now, Al. Catch me when I come off duty."

Al grinned and put the bottle aside. "Looks like a quiet night."

"Quiet, just the way we like it, Al."

Jud moved a black checker up a space. "How's the new boy working out, Mose?"

Mose shook his head. "Too early to tell. Seems to like it, but it's got to be awful dull here for a city boy. We'll see how he sticks."

The object of the men's curiosity was tilted back in a chair, his feet resting on the desk, when Mose got to the sheriff's office.

"Quiet day, hunh?" Mose grinned, lounging in the doorway.

"Quiet," Joe Torino said. "I've been here a week and haven't made an arrest yet."

"Getting bored already, Joe?"

"It's the kind of boredom I can live with, Sheriff. Do you have any idea what it's like being a cop back east? A guy can take that pressure only so long."

"You're not the first. All kinds of young eastern cops have been moving west to work."

"I know. One of my partners moved to Nebraska. We looked around and decided on Wyoming. It should take a while for all the trouble to move out here."

Mose slipped the matchstick out of his mouth and stuck it into his shirt pocket. "Don't you guys back east ever get any movies, Joe? We had our crime wave back in the last century."

Joe slid the front legs of the chair onto the floor and stood up, reaching for his hat. "For a while I worked out of Juvenile. It didn't take long for those kids to get to me."

"We've got kids here," Mose said.

"Not like these kids, twelve and thirteen years old with fifty years experience behind them. My last day, I went out to pick up a pusher who'd been working the schools. The damn fool was high and decided to shoot it out. He died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital."

"Why waste tears on vermin like that?"

Joe started for the door then turned back. "He was seventeen years old, got hooked on heroin at fourteen by his best friend. He turned to pushing to get the money to feed his own habit."

Mose nodded. "That's been my experience with these kid addicts. You find a user, you've got your-

self a pusher. They turn their friends into junkies for the money, or maybe just for the hell of it. Forget him, Joe."

"You're right, Sheriff," Joe said, "but in this case he's hard to forget. You see, he was my kid brother, Danny."

Mose shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry, Joe, but there you are. This drug thing is like a cancer. The only way to cure it is to cut it out."

"When we found out May was expecting, I thought about getting out. After Danny died, I decided. I don't want to raise my kids back there."

Mose sat back in the chair Joe had vacated. "We've got a peaceful town here, Joe, some folks would say downright dull. Nice place to raise a family. But that peace has its price. Time comes—you may find you don't want to pay it."

Then he broke the serious mood which had descended on the office. "Git on home to your wife. She's probably waiting supper on you."

May Torino was waiting for her husband, the supper keeping warm in the oven, but she didn't mind. She had waited many times before, only with a difference. Then, when Joe was a few minutes late, she had waited in fear, dreading the phone call that could change her from a young wife to a widow.

It had happened to two of her

friends, wives of other young cops. So when Joe walked in the house, she ran to him and hugged him as always but now without trembling with relief.

After supper, they sat on the porch swing, rocking quietly. May shivered and Joe put his arm around her.

"Cold, Baby?"

"No," she replied. "Just happy. You don't know what it's like, Joey, seeing you off in the morning, knowing you'll be home for supper at night just like any other husband. Having you home every evening. I just can't quite believe my luck."

"Neither could I at first. Who ever heard of the new cop getting the day shift? That Mose is really something. He came down on me hard when I offered to take the night shift, said it was fine for an old bachelor like him but a man with a young wife and a kid coming," he patted the mound of her belly, "should be home at night."

"But, Joey," May laughed and slapped at his hand, "Mose isn't a bachelor . . ." She stopped and flushed.

"And where did you hear that?" Joe looked at her sternly, "Gossiping again?"

"Well, if you're not interested," she said in a voice which closed the subject until Joe laughed and urged her to spill it.

"Mose was married. His wife died a few years ago and left him

with a son. His son was quite a boy, honor student, star athlete, went to college on a football scholarship. Only then . . ." her voice broke and Joe saw tears dampening her cheeks in the twilight. "Oh, Joey, it's so sad!

"He was on his way back to Laramie, to the university, after Christmas vacation. He picked up some drugged-up hitchhiker on the road. The police found his body by the side of the highway the next day. He was beaten so badly it took a while to identify him."

"Did they ever catch the guy who did it?" Joe asked in a stricken voice.

May shook her head. "They found the car and the boy's clothes in Colorado, but the hitchhiker just disappeared. Sarah Harms said the Sheriff brought the boy's body back, buried him beside his mother, then never mentioned him again.

"She figures he worked off his grief by helping the kids in town. A lot of them were going wild—outside influences, Sarah said—but the Sheriff got them straightened out fast. He still sees they don't get off on the wrong foot."

Joe was silent for a long while. Then he said, "He never mentioned the boy, not even today when I told him about Danny . . ." He broke off at May's strangled sob.

"I'm sorry, honey, I shouldn't have brought that up."

May slid her arms around Joe and clung to him. "No, it's all right, Joe. It's just, whenever I think about Danny—that could happen to our kids if we go back. Promise me, Joe, promise me we'll never go back."

He held her tightly and rocked her in the porch swing. "I promise May. Nothing will ever make us go back."

For the next month, nothing changed in DeWitt Crossing. When Joe took over from Mose in the morning, there was never anything to report, and Joe's days were spent walking the wooden sidewalks of the town or reading magazines in the sheriff's office. The men playing checkers in front of the post office were friendly enough, but Joe had never been awarded that badge of belonging, a draw from the ever-present bottle by the checkerboard.

They would talk though; whenever Joe stopped, they would pull out a chair and fill him in on the history of the town. To Joe's city ears it all sounded wonderfully dull. Except for "the little spell of trouble a while back when the young folks was actin up" but it seemed "the Sheriff set them straight, right enough." It all had a cozy stability about it.

So it was a surprise to him to come in one morning and have Mose announce, "Al Harms' boy ran away last night."

The big-city-cop in Joe stirred at the news.

"Are you sure he ran away? Any chance it might be a kidnapping?"

Mose laughed. "Down, boy. No big crime here. Al's sure. They had a big go-round last night. Boy up and announced he was dropping out of school, going to California to find himself. Al told him he could damn well find himself right here in DeWitt Crossing. Almost came to blows, I guess.

"The boy ran out and hasn't come back. He'll probably get picked up by the state police for hitchhiking. Just wanted you to know in case a call comes in."

Joe watched him walk up the street, pausing for a moment beside the checker players in front of the post office and accepting a drink from the bottle now that he was off duty. Joe smiled to himself and debated the wisdom of arresting the sheriff for public consumption, but decided against it.

Just before noon he got into the patrol car and drove out to the only patch of shade around. To the east in the Black Hills and northwest in the Big Horns, tall pine and spruce stretched to the sky, sheltering quaking aspen. But around DeWitt Crossing the only trees were the willows and cottonwoods that crowded the creek banks searching for moisture.

He stretched out under a large cottonwood on the bank of the creek that wandered past the town

and ate his lunch. As his eyes played over the thick grove that lined the creek, his attention was caught by a disturbance of the ground.

He walked back into the trees and looked closely. It was clear that someone had been digging here and was not too concerned with anyone noticing it. Some effort had been made to move leaves and twigs back over the spot, but not much.

The ground was soft and Joe scooped at it with his hands. What he found startled him. It was a human hand. He followed the line of the arm up to the shoulder and gently uncovered the head. One look was enough. It was Al Harms' boy and he had been neatly shot through the head. Executed rather than murdered. Joe knew that the only gun in town was the Colt .45 strapped around Mose Webb.

He left the body and drove back to town. He picked up a spade from the sheriff's office, then broke the news to Al. Al, Jud, and a couple of the other old timers drove out to see.

When they came to the make-shift grave, Joe cleared the dirt from the body and led Al over to look. Al stared down at the body silently for a moment and then walked back to the car.

"You know who did this, don't you?" Joe asked as their silence eroded his confidence.

Jud Witcomb moved away from

the group and bent over the body.

"Did you see this, Deputy?" he asked and lifted the dead arm.

Joe squatted down and looked at a line of old scars and some newer marks on the boy's arm.

"What do they call those where you come from?" Jud asked.

Joe looked up into the old eyes. "Tracks," he said.

Jud turned away and climbed into the waiting car.

Joe watched the men drive away. He looked down at the boy at his feet and then around the grove. He saw what he had missed in the excitement of finding the body, other signs of disturbance, some new, some already grown over through the years.

He took the spade and dug at a few of the depressions until he had confirmed his suspicions. Then he leaned on his spade and looked out over the countryside and thought a long time about peace.

Mose Webb shifted the matchstick from left to right in his mouth. He hitched the holster of his Colt .45 to a more comfortable position and headed downtown to relieve his deputy.

He stopped to jaw awhile with the mayor and the postmaster at their evening checker game, looked startled at something they said, refused the offer of a drink and walked on to the sheriff's office.

Joe Torino was tilted back in a chair, his feet resting on the desk.

"Quiet day?" Mose asked,

lounging in the doorway. He became aware of a waiting silence at his back and glanced at the checker players. At his look they returned to their game and made a pretense of continuing their conversation.

Joe Torino slid his feet off the desk and reached for his hat.

"Quiet," he said.

Mose stopped him at the door. "When that baby of yours gets here, things will liven up." He watched Joe for any change in expression. "You've got a good place to raise him, peaceful. If we work together we can keep it that way."

"Yeah," Joe said. Then he repeated, "Yeah."

Mose watched from the doorway as Joe walked up the street. Joe stopped beside the checker players in front of the post office. He hesitated for a moment and then accepted a drink from their bottle.

Mose turned into the office. He caught sight of the spade leaning against the wall. He stooped down and fingered the drying sod stuck to the blade.

"Ought to speak to that boy about cleaning up the tools after he uses them," he growled. Then he smiled and carried the spade out back and scraped the dirt from the blade.

"He'll do all right," he spoke to himself. "He'll stick."

THE SCENT OF DEATH

The MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel for April

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Why is shoplifting encouraged in Miami's newest and most luxurious department store—and why are security guards turning up dead? Shayne walks a tightrope with death in one of his most peril-fraught cases.

ALSO IN APRIL

A New Danger-packed novelet—

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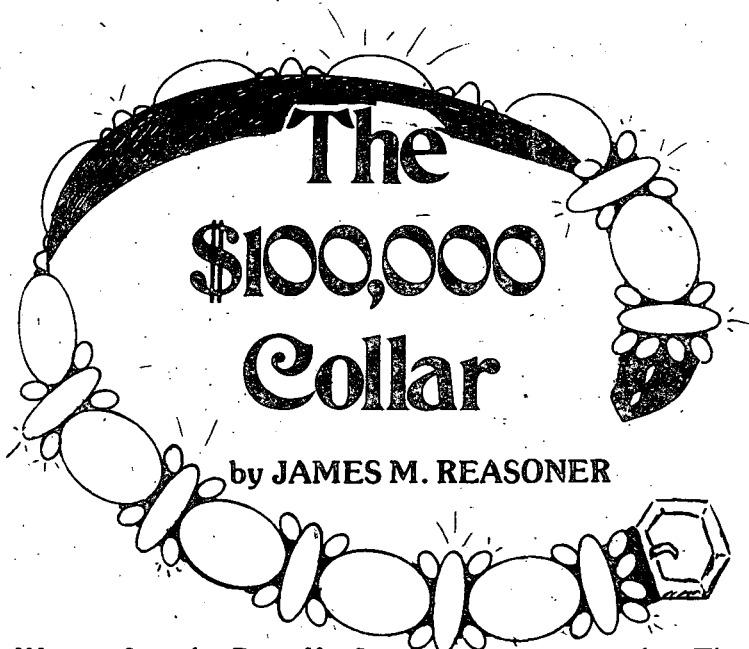
THE MISER

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THREE HOT DAYS

by Edward D. Hoch

—plus a full docket of other short mysteries, all of them new.



The \$100,000 Collar

by JAMES M. REASONER

It Was a Simple Payoff—Insurance Loot to the Thief in Return for the Stolen Article. but Things Didn't Work out as the Thieves Planned Them.

DELANEY WAS leaning back in his chair, feet on the desk. He was trying to count the specks of dust floating in the shaft of late afternoon sunlight that was slanting in through the office window. He was up to sixty-seven when the door opened.

"Hello. Can I come in?"

Delaney looked up, saw the pleasant, chubby face of Bernard Fenton, and said, "Sure. How are things at Allied Insurance these

days?"

Fenton sat down in the client's chair. "Busy, just like always. That's why I'm here."

Delaney raised eyebrows.

"Can you do a job for us this evening?"

"I think I can work it in. What is it?"

"We're buying back a stolen item. We'd like for you to handle the transaction."

"Why me?"

"You've worked with us before. Allied trusts you, Delaney."

"You allowed to tell me some details?"

"Of course." Fenton took a small notebook from an inside pocket and opened it. "The stolen item belongs to a Mrs. Agnes Clairmont. It's a jewelled cat collar insured for \$100,000."

"Hold it."

"Yes?"

"You did say a jewelled *cat* collar, insured for \$100,000?"

"That's right."

"Okay. I just wanted to be sure I heard right."

Fenton cleared his throat and went on. "The thief contacted us and offered to return the collar for \$25,000. Since the police have made no progress in discovering his identity and the chances of recovery seem slight, Allied has decided to go ahead and pay."

"It's cheaper, but that's still a pile of money."

Fenton looked painfully aware of that. "Some things can't be helped."

"I guess you got some instructions about how to make the transfer."

"Yes, the thief called Mrs. Clairmont earlier this afternoon and she passed them along to us. It's set to take place tonight at nine o'clock."

"Where?"

"Sheppard Park."

Delaney's laugh was hollow.

"You want me to carry twenty-five grand into that mugger's paradise after dark? What's to stop the guy from slipping a knife into me and taking off with the cash?"

"This has been a highly professional job right down the line. You know that type won't touch violence unless they're forced to. We've already given in to his demands, Delaney. He'll have no reason to get tough."

"Well . . . it'll cost you."

"Whatever you say is fine with us."

"My minimum is two hundred —"

Fenton began to smile.

"— but this is worth four. Okay?"

"Yes, of course. Now, if you'll come by the Allied offices at eight-thirty, we'll have the money ready. The thief said to have our man enter the park through the Highland Street entrance, then sit down on the sixth bench on the right."

"That's it?"

"That's it. He told Mrs. Clairmont that he could take care of everything else. When you have the collar, you can come straight to Mrs. Clairmont's home. I'll be waiting for you there."

Delaney sighed. "I'll do it. But you know, Bernie, taking this job may not be the smartest thing I've ever done."

"Thanks, Delaney. You're doing both Allied and me a big favor."

Delaney shook his head. Fenton said, "Is there something else?"

"I was just thinking," Delaney said. "That must be one helluva cat."

Delaney counted the park benches as he walked briskly along the cobblestone path. When he reached the sixth one on his right, he sat down on one end of it and put the plain black suitcase beside him. The suitcase was packed full of tens and twenties, as ordered.

There were lights scattered here and there through the park, but they didn't do much to dispel the darkness. There were dense patches of shadow everywhere. Delaney hadn't seen another person since he entered the park.

His nerves began to bother him as he sat there, waiting. It had been nearly two weeks since he had had a drink, and he was still on the wagon, although the ride was a rough one and threatened to bounce him off at any moment.

The sound of footsteps came to his ears. Someone was coming down the path toward him, coming from deeper in the park. Delaney was very much aware of the money beside him and he almost wished he hadn't decided to give up carrying a gun.

A light nearby spread a pool of brightness over the path. As Delaney watched, a figure carrying a paper bag moved slowly into that pool. Delaney took in the faded sweater, the rundown shoes, the

slumped shoulders, and the loose-lipped grin that signified poorly fitting dentures.

He realized with a flash of surprise that he knew the man, even through the wino disguise.

The old man sat at the other end of the bench and said, "I never thought you'd be the one carryin' the money, Delaney. Long time no see."

"And I thought Jack Ingersoll had retired from this business a long time ago."

"Well, you know how it is, Delaney. A fella's gotta keep his hand in. Besides, you know I never could stay away from the ice for too long."

"Yeah, I know, Jack. You took a few falls for it, too."

"I sure did. That never stopped me, though. You ain't gonna call the cops down on me now, are you, Delaney? I get busted now, I'd never get out. I'd like to spend what days I got left on the outside."

"You'd better stay away from jobs like this from now on then, hadn't you? How'd you pull it?"

Ingersoll's grin got bigger. "Shoot, it wasn't even a challenge. That old broad didn't have no special locks on her windows, and her jewelry box wasn't locked up at all. I never expected to find what I found there, though."

"I heard about that. You got it in the sack?"

"Sure do. Damnedest thing I've ever seen. That old woman must

have all of the money and none of the sense to buy a thing like that for a cat. If you'll just slide that suitcase over here, I'll let you have a look."

Delaney pushed the suitcase over to the old man, who then tossed the paper bag the length of the bench. Delaney caught it and opened it.

Even in the dim light, he could see the diamonds and rubies sparkling on the wide leather collar inside. It was the damndest thing he'd ever seen.

Jack Ingersoll tucked the suitcase under his arm and stood up. Delaney asked, "You're not going to count it?"

"I trust you, Delaney. If it'd been somebody else, I would have. Now I'd be obliged if you just sit tight for a few minutes. I don't move near so fast as I used to, you know."

"Okay, Jack. The insurance man just said to bring back the collar. That's all I'm interested in."

"Be seein' ya, Delaney."

"Take it easy, Jack."

Delaney waited for almost ten minutes before he stood up. He would have bet money that old Jack Ingersoll could still move pretty good and that he was piling up distance right now.

He smiled slightly. He had the blasted ridiculous cat collar, and that was all he cared about.

Delaney didn't have any trouble finding Mrs. Agnes Clairmont's house, even though it was in an

expensive part of town that he was not too familiar with. He parked his battered old Chrysler in the circular driveway at nine-thirty and went up to ring the bell beside the big front door.

Bernard Fenton opened the door immediately. Delaney said, "Hi, Bernie," and held up the paper bag.

"Is that it?" Fenton's tone was hushed.

"Sure is."

Mrs. Clairmont's waiting in the study."

Agnes Clairmont didn't surprise Delaney. She was elegant and white-haired and aristocratic, with a slightly unfocussed look in her eyes that told him her husband had died and left her with plenty of money and nothing to do. A white cat was perched in her lap.

Fenton said, "We have good news, Mrs. Clairmont. This is our Mr. Delaney, and he's recovered your collar."

"How do you do, Mr. Delaney." She held out a hand. For a second, Delaney felt that he was expected to kiss it, then shook it. "I'm very glad you have the collar, but it isn't really mine, you know. It belongs to Frostie."

Delaney had expected a Persian or a Siamese, but the cat was a common domestic shorthair. He rubbed its ears and said, "Hi, Frostie. Glad to meet you, Mrs. Clairmont. Here's the collar."

He handed the bag to Fenton, who opened it and took the collar

out. It was even more spectacular in the light.

Delaney heard movement behind him and turned his head to see another man walking toward them. Fenton handed the collar to him. To Delaney, he said, "This is Mr. Hopkins, our jewelry expert. He'll examine the collar to make sure it's authentic."

"Oh, it's the correct collar," Mrs. Clairmont said. "Frostie and I would know it anywhere."

"Just a formality, Mrs. Clairmont," Fenton said, "We have to be very careful."

Hopkins began to examine the stones in the collar closely. He was a small dapper man with an air of habitual nervousness. After a few moments, he looked up from the collar and frowned at Fenton.

"I am sorry to have to tell you this, Mr. Fenton," he said, "but the stones in this collar are not genuine."

"What?"

"There must be a mistake," Mrs. Clairmont said, looking distressed. "I'm sure it's the same collar."

"They are fairly good copies," Hopkins went on. "However, they are certainly not what they look like. This collar is worth very little."

Fenton was pale. "You mean Allied Insurance paid \$25,000 for a fake?"

Hopkins nodded.

"I don't understand! I just don't understand!" Mrs. Clairmont was

saying. "I'm positive that's the same collar I had made for my Frostie two years ago."

Fenton turned to her and now his smile was gone. "In that case, Mrs. Clairmont," he said in cold tones, "perhaps you can tell us why you reported a very valuable item as stolen when it was really nothing but a cheap copy?"

"I really won't stand for that kind of talk in my home. Why, I—"

"I'll tell you why." Delaney had moved off to one side during Hopkins' examination of the collar, but now he spoke. "Think about it a minute, Bernie. There had to be a real collar at one time. Your people appraised it and insured it. Something's happened to it since then. Maybe she lost it, maybe she sold it."

"I did no such thing."

Delaney ignored her and continued. "So she had the copy made. Then she decided to fake the robbery. But she wanted to play it safe and cozy. Instead of going for the full value, she settled for the twenty-five thousand."

"She hired a guy to play the thief. He carried out the act with me, and Allied shelled out the money. I don't know why she would do it. It looks like she's rich enough to me, but then people do weird things sometimes."

Mrs. Clairmont put the cat on the floor and stood up. "This is an absolute outrage and I want all of you to leave immediately. Your su-

periors will be hearing from me, Mr. Fenton."

"I'm sure they'll be wanting to talk to you, too," Fenton said. "And our legal department will be in touch with you about fraud charges."

Delaney nodded. "Yeah, it's a neat dodge, Bernie. Too bad it doesn't work."

All three of them looked at him.

"You see, I know the guy who had the collar. He's an old-timer, an ice man from 'way back, and he's nobody's stooge. He wouldn't be interested in a deal like I just laid out. He just hit this place to prove he could still do it."

"Then this is really Frostie's collar?" Mrs. Clairmont asked.

"Sure. That old guy wouldn't lift a phony."

"But the gems are not real," Hopkins insisted.

Fenton said, "This doesn't make sense, Delaney."

"Sure it does, Bernie. It makes plenty of sense if you and Hopkins are working together. You give the lady some scare talk about fraud charges and get her all shook up. Then you back down some, tell her you don't want a scandal, even promise her you won't tell your bosses about it."

"But you'll take the collar with you as evidence anyway. You tell her to keep quiet about it and not to ever try anything like that again. Then you go tell your bosses that the real collar is safely back in Mrs. Clairmont's hands, and

you and Hopkins walk off with \$100,000 worth of cat collar."

Fenton was pale again. "You don't really believe any of that?"

"Yeah. I do. I even think I could prove it. All we have to do is bring in another expert to look at the collar."

Mrs. Clairmont said, "That sounds like a fine idea."

Hopkins said hurriedly, "Maybe I was wrong, maybe I made a mistake -"

"Shut up!" Fenton said, "Don't say another word."

Delaney took the collar out of Hopkins' limp fingers and handed it to Mrs. Clairmont.

"Don't worry about it, Bernie," he said to Fenton. "I'm not all that interested in seeing you in jail. You saw a chance, took a shot and didn't make it. Just don't ever bring me in on something like this again."

"I don't think you'll be getting any of Allied's business," Fenton said tightly.

"I can live without it. There is one thing, though, Bernie."

"What's that?"

"You haven't paid me for this yet. I did my part and got the collar back. Allied owes me four hundred dollars."

Fenton started to say something and then changed his mind. With a pained expression on his face, he reached into an inside pocket and pulled out a folded check.

Delaney took it, smiled and said, "Thanks."

A WORD ABOUT MIKE SHAYNE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

As MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE approaches the quarter-century mark, it seems only appropriate to comment upon some of the events and developments that have occurred during the more than two decades of its existence.

Mike, in magazine form, was concocted first in the fertile brain of the late Leo Margulies, already a veteran editor and publisher of a vast variety of magazines, including *Mystery Book Magazine*, *The Phantom Detective* and *The Saint Mystery Magazine* as he prepared to launch *Renown Publications* late in 1956.

At the outset, Davis Dresser, the real-life Brett Halliday and creator of Michael Shayne, Lucy Hamilton, Tim Rourke and Chief of Police Will Gentry, was closely associated with his monthly offspring. In an advisory capacity, Dresser read each new lead story before it was purchased to make sure that the author did not violate any of the already famous Miami redhead's long established personal and professional foibles and habits.

For the first several years of its existence, the magazine's lead Shayne novelets were approximately 10,000 words long—a length which was doubled some years later to its present 20,000-word length. Mike Shayne has, in recent years, been the protagonist in a series of Dell paperback novels. He has appeared in a number of movies and two television series.

The authors whose bylines have backed up Brett Halliday include, to cite but a few, such mystery writing stars as Edward D. Hoch, Jonathan Craig, Frank Sisk, Lawrence Treat, Lawrence G. Blochman, Pauline C. Smith, John Lutz, Bill Pronzini, Barry N. Malzburg, Hal Ellson, Keith Ayling, Ed Wellen, Talmage Powell, Charles W. Runyon, James Holding, George C. Chesbro, James, McKimmey, Dana Lyon—the endless.

A great variety of things has happened in the world in the past two-and-a-half decades—it seems all but beyond belief that the tenth anniversary of man's reaching the surface of the moon will be

upcoming a bit later this year—but Mike Shayne has been making his monthly appearances through thick and thin. And the loyalty of his readers has been a thing of beauty.

In the late summer of 1972, *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* moved bag and baggage from its Manhattan birthplace to balmier Los Angeles, where it has resided ever since. In December of 1975, Leo Margulies succumbed to a complex of ailments, but the magazine continued to appear with his widow, Cylvia K. Margulies sitting in the publisher's chair.

In November of 1977, a bout of ill health forced Mrs. Margulies to retire and the magazine was taken over by its present publishers, Edward and Anita Goldstein and again moved, this time from West Hollywood to the San Fernando Valley. Apart from a number of improvements in cover design and internal format, the Goldsteins have adhered wholly to the ideas and ideals of its previous publishers.

Inevitably, of course, there are changes of content. Miniskirts came and went, while pantsuits and denims have come into fashion and show no visible symptoms of becoming passe at this writing. Language has become a great deal freer, as have the morals of many of the characters, especially in the short stories and novelets.

But Mike Shayne himself hews very closely to the original format. If he cusses occasionally, it is with cause, and never does he lapse into obscenity. If he takes an occasional flier with some woman other than the faithful Lucy, he invariably (or almost invariably) yields to temptation only when his secretary-great-and-good-friend is out of town (or at least well out of the way). He is honorable at heart and even his enemies know this.

But Mike Shayne is tough with a core of steel. If he lacks a university degree, he is street-smart and has piled up a vast fund of experience over the years. If he is seemingly ageless—well, dammit, he has to be if his magazine is to continue in existence.

Occasionally in the course of a case, Shayne is forced to leave his beloved Miami. But unlike the magazine itself, it appears utterly improbable that he will ever move permanently to California. Miami born as a fictional character, he must stay that way if he is to stay Mike Shayne.

As long as his readers remain in his corner, the redhead will continue to track down malefactors once a month, with the intelligence, valor and occasional flashes of humor and sympathy he has always shown.

It is his hope (and ours) that you will be in his corner for a long, long time to come.

Thank you,
Brett Halliday

A TOAST TO MAMA HEIDI DOG

by DIANA HANSEN

Jim and His Housemate Were Unable to Save Their Beloved Great Dane—but They Were Smart Enough to Avenge Her Fate.

MY THREE doggie-woggies are the center of my universe.

While I'm typing, Miss Ham-Bon-Bone comes over and puts her soft silky head on my lap. I squoosh-and-snuggle her ears.

"Do you want an s-and-s too?" I ask Haole-Dog, Hambone's sister. A big white Great Dane, she's sitting on my couch, her blue eyes flashing with jealousy. At the sound of her name, she bounces over to me like a rabbit.

"I should call you Peter Rabbit," I tell her, chiding her gently for hopping in the house. "A hundred-and-thirty-five-pound rabbit." I give her ears the same squoosh and snuuuuggle.

Old Mama Heidi-Dog, the matriarch, groans and moans to her feet. She shakes and shudders and wags and ambles over for her s-and-s.

All three dogs finally squooshed and snuggled, I tell them to lie down. Haole-Dog falls asleep, her legs twitching and churning as she dreams of the Great Chase.

Back to my typewriter. A misbehaving murder mystery. The body. The body. Without a way to dispose of the body, the murder will be discovered. The body.

I wrestle with the body as the hot Hawaiian afternoon hours drift by. It gets cooler outside. The mynah birds start their dusky racket. From my window, I can see the last of the sailboats in Kailua Bay heading for shore. The colors deepen around the Mokulua islands.

Jim, my roommate, comes home.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asks. "Its after six. And we are supposed to be at the Bowens for supper at seven.

"I can't figure out how to get rid of the body."

"Well, think about it while I fix a drink." He goes to the kitchen and returns with two brandy-and-sodas.

I sip the brandy and soda. The body.

"The old woman at the bottom

of the hill was yelling at me when "What about?"

"What else? The dogs." He raises his voice and imitates her witch-like whine. "You've got to get rid of those damn dogs. They carry disease. They're a menace. They're evil. They have evil spirits."

"She's the one who should be put away," I say. "She's the menace."

The old woman down the hill was, indeed, a menace. She was absolutely wacko. She belonged to a strange white-robed sect and was always building rock "fences" around her house out into the middle of the dead-end cul-de-sac, making it quite impossible for her only other neighbors—us—to drive up our driveway. At least once a month I would drive over a sharp rock that she'd "fenced" out to ward off the "evil spirits."

"She thinks the dogs are housing evil spirits, I think," Jim comments.

"It's old Mama Heidi-Dog." At the sound of her name, Old Mama Heidi squooched a few inches closer. She was looking hopefully at the glass of brandy and soda. As well as being a glutton, she was slightly on the alcoholic side, favoring brandy Alexanders over martinis two-to-one.

"She's always down there, snooping around in her garbage, trying to see what she can find. Aren't you, Old Mama Heidi?" I

pat her head. She moans in pleasure.

I've had Old Mama Heidi-Dog for nearly nine years—a long life for a Great Dane. I love her and her two errant daughters as if they were my own flesh and blood.

"Well—maybe we'd better try to keep her out of the old bag's way," Jim says, rising. "The other night she was down at the foot of the driveway putting a curse on the house. Or something. Waving and flailing her arms around. *Jesus!*"

I settle the dogs down on their couch out on the patio before I leave for the Bowens. I open a fresh box of Mystic Mints—their favorite after-dinner snack—and leave them with a few unopened packages of Twinkies scattered around. They have a great time opening them and pulling the Twinkies out.

"Be a good dog, and stay out of the old lady's garbage," I tell Mama Heidi-Dog, who is lying resplendent on her own twin-size mattress in the corner. It has a twin-fitted Snoopy sheet on it. Her black-and-white Harlequin spots made a stunning pattern against it. She looks at me hopefully. I receive dog-thought-waves of hunger.

"No!" I tell her. "You're gaining weight! And two packages of Twinkies is enough!"

"Stop fooling around with those dogs and come on!" yells Jim; gunning the motor of the car. I

hop in and we're off, down the hill.

As we drive past her house, the old lady is out, busily balancing two-by-fours on cinder blocks and rocks for her nightly "fence." She raises her arms and shouts at us as we drive past.

"Why does she hate us?" I ask Jim.

"The dogs. She hates the dogs."

"But why?"

"She's nuts. Absolutely nuts."

The evening with the Bowens is nice, but dull. Jim and I pull in around the rock fence in the street and drive up to the house. Miss Bone and Miss Dog run out to the car.

"Where's Old Mama Heidi?" I ask them. They whine. I walk out to the patio. Old Mama Heidi-Dog is lying on her side on her snoopy sheets, blood at her mouth, breathing heavy and funny.

I yell for Jim. She wheezes, and whines, and tries to get up. Her legs won't hold her.

"Get the vet," I yell to Jim. "Dammit, *get the vet!*"

I stay with her on the porch until the vet comes. She is passing blood, apologetically, ashamed that she can't go out and use her own spot on the lawn.

I am crying. The vet looks at her, lifts her jowels, her eyelids. Haole-Dog and Hambone are whining; Jim puts them in my bedroom. They start to howl.

The vet looks grim. Old Mama Heidi-Dog cries out and her body

convulses. Blood dribbles from her mouth.

"She's dying," the vet says. "There's nothing we can do." "Dying?" I say. "Dying?"

Tears stream down my face. Jim gives the two other dogs a package of Oreos to keep them quiet. It does no good. They know. Their keening and howling grows louder.

I bend over and put my head on Mama Heidi-Dog's thick warm neck. I can't stop crying.

"I'm sorry," I say to her. "Come on, Old Mama Heidi Dog—come on, now. I'm sorry."

"We ought to put her to sleep." The vet looks grim.

"Isn't there anything you can do? *Anything?*"

"No. It looks like poison."

"*Poison!*"

"Yes, poison. The way her legs won't work—the blood—the froth—some kind of poison, perhaps rat poison."

"*Poison!*" I sit in stunned silence. Mama Heidi-Dog screeches in pain again.

And then I know. Dog-thoughts, giant waves of dog-thoughts wash over me. It was the old lady down the hill.

"Was it the old lady?" I ask Mama Heidi-Dog. "*Was it?*"

She lifts her head—I swear!—she lifts her head and her eyes clear up and she looks at me and I know—I know to this day—that she communicated an answer: Yes.

She lays her head back down. The vet pulls out a needle and works quietly. I hold her head in my lap while her eyes film over and she stops breathing. I sit there a long time after the vet leaves, just sit there, on the porch, with the dogs howling in my bedroom. Just sit there, tears streaming down my face, remembering all of the good times we've had.

Jim brings out her favorite blanket. We throw it over her and sit out there until dawn.

"I'd better call the pound about the body," he says. I sit there, alone, watching a beautiful sunrise. Old Mama-Heidi is stiff and cold—oh, so *cold!*—at my feet. It is the first time I have ever experienced death, really—it is so final. And so unjustified. And then I feel the first stab of fear in my heart for the two other dogs—Miss Ham-Bon-Bone and Miss Haole-Dog.

Jim returns from the phone.

"Jim, it was the old lady. I know it was."

He looks at me. "I know it, too." He thinks a minute. Then, "God! How I hate people that poison animals!" There are tears in his eyes.

"I'm going to kill her," I say out loud.

"Don't talk like that," he says sharply.

"She'll poison the others. She will."

He doesn't say anything. He

can't. He goes to the kitchen and mixes a stiff brandy.

"Before seven a.m.?" I ask.

"You're not going to believe what we have to do," he says. "They won't come up the hill to pick her up. We have to take her down to the street."

"Take old Mama Heidi-Dog down to the street?" I ask in disbelief. "Just leave her in the street?"

"Well, we're supposed to wrap up—the—body." Jim says. "The man said to—put it in—a garbage bag."

"A *what?*" I screech. "A *garbage bag?* Put her in a garbage bag and dump her in the street?"

"Yes."

"We'll just bury her in the woods, that's what we'll do then," I say. "I have no intention of dumping Old Mama Heidi Dog in the street."

"We can't. It's against the law. Too hot, and too much chance of attracting other—animals."

I start to cry again. Hambone and Haolé start to howl again.

"We can use a painter's drop cloth," Jim says soothingly. "Here. Drink this. That's it. Now come on. Let's get it done."

We wrap her up in her favorite sheet and blanket, with her head resting on her little bone-shaped pillow with her name in felt on it. Tears fall on her cold, stiff form.

"Come on, now, stop it," Jim says, crying.

"You stop it yourself," I tell

him, crying.

We cover her face and then, awkwardly, begin to wrap up the blanketed form in the plastic drop-cloth, taping it up with masking tape as we go along.

I force myself not to think of old faithful Mama Heidi-Dog, bagged and wrapped, a chunk of nothing, on her way to be cremated.

When we are done, you couldn't tell it's a dog. It's just a big bulk in a plastic bag. And that's all there is of Old Mama Heidi-Dog.

"Come on," says Jim. We both lift the bulk onto a sheet and fashion a sort of sling. We half-lift, half-drag it out the door and down the hill. I start to cry again as we near the bottom. The humane society truck is waiting for us.

Suddenly the door flies open and the old hag comes out. White robes, and all. Smiling maliciously.

"How many died, dears?" she says.

I look at her. I hate her. I hate her so badly I want to kill her there and then.

Jim snarls, "Just shut up. Just shut your face."

"Don't speak to me like that. Don't get smart with me, young man."

"Come on," says the driver, a big Hawaiian fellow in blue jeans and a Primo shirt.

The old woman laughs.

Jim says, "Get out of here. Now!" The way he says it, she

turns and scuttles back into her house. I see the curtains part as she continues to watch us.

It takes all three of us—the driver, Jim and I—to load the bundle onto the back of the truck.

"What is this?" the driver asks.

"A Great Dane," I said.

"Heavy enough to be a man!" the driver says, grunting and puffing.

He slams the door shut and starts to drive away. We look at the truck and see the plastic bundle bounce as the tires hit a pothole. Old Mama Heidi-Dog will be taken down, dumped and burned. A terrible, anonymous ending for a magnificent dog and faithful companion.

Jim and I walk back up the hill, arm in arm. Silence. Then, "You know, Jim—I just thought of something."

Jim. "So did I."

More silence.

We enter the house.

I open the bedroom door. Hambone and Haole come leaping out, anxious for reassurance and love and attention.

I sit them down on the couch and tell them we will all have to bear up and go on living, even though their mother is dead. Dog thoughts from Hambone.

"No. Don't worry," I say. "I'll take care of it."

I go into the kitchen.

"You know, Jim," I say. "That man didn't even know whether or not that was a dog. Or a human. In

that package."

"I know."

"No one is ever going to unwrap a dead Great Dane and check to see if it's really a dead Great Dane," I say.

"I know," he says.

I think. Hambone thinks. Haole thinks. Jim thinks.

I pull out a cake mix.

"You know, when there's a death in the family, one should try to mend fences," I say carefully. "It might be the neighborly thing to take a cake down to the old lady and mend fences."

Jim mixes up a brandy Alexander for Hambone and Haole. "The Christian thing to do," he agrees. "An excellent idea."

"Do you think she has any relatives?" I ask, pulling out the box of rat poison from under the sink.

"Nope," Jim says cheerfully.

Humming to myself, I pour, mix, stir.

Jim goes to the sideboard and mixes two stiff brandy-and-sodas. He sets the two Alexanders on the floor for Hambone and Haole.

"The four of us must toast," he says, handing me my drink.

I pop the cake into the oven.

"Here's to Mama Heidi-Dog," Jim says, raising his glass. Hambone and Haole lap up their drinks.

"Yes. Here's to Old Mama Heidi-Dog," I say. And drink.

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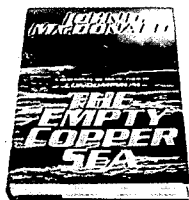
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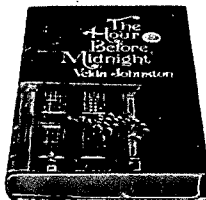
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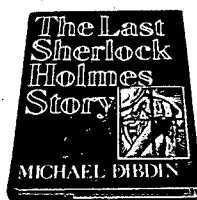
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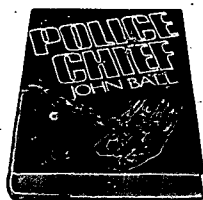
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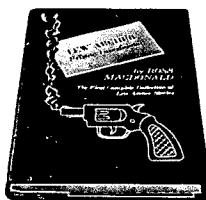
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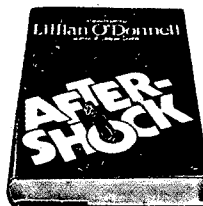
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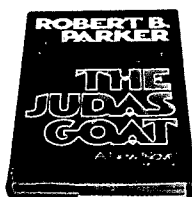
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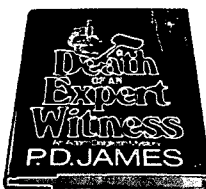
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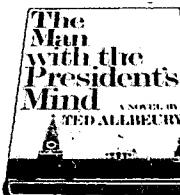
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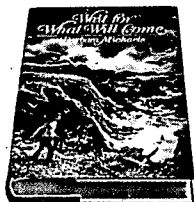
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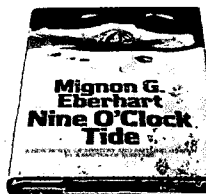
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